

Small Talk



The dust was getting in his eyes he could hear them. They were most likely to kill each other for the water. Suddenly one passed, then the rest came. Nancy and Don were keeping them in good order. Good dogs! Bob was behind the sheep. Don yelped he had been hurt!

Aidan Singh-Howard, age 10

The sheep started to drink. More and more came, piling on top of one another. Bill ran straight into the middle of the herd. He tried to round 'em up while Russell was riding his horse in this hot, dry land. It was called Australia.

Rhys Manttan, age 9

Image: A break away!, 1891, Tom ROBERTS, Australia, 1856-1931, Elder Bequest Fund 1899



Selected works of art from the Art Gallery of South Australia
Education Services Resource



Education Services at the Gallery would like to invite you to participate in a very special Small Talk opportunity as part of your Art Gallery experience,. We wish to encourage students to write about the works of art they have just seen, and then to send them to us. We will select some of the best writing and hang it next to the work of art as a wall label.. You can already see some of these 'blue' wall labels around the Gallery. So keep your eyes open for them.

The Small Talk label initiative encourages connections with the Art Gallery, and enjoyment of the works of art by young people of primary school age. It invites students to make public their response to the works of art. The students are asked to write about the exhibits they have seen after they return to school. Of course it is not intended that all students respond to all of the exhibits in this way. It is more realistic to think that students in a class will be stimulated to focus their writing on one or a few of the key works in the Permanent Collection.

How does 'Small Talk' work?

- Classes of students and their teachers visit the Gallery on an organised excursion
- the teachers and their students look at, talk about and describe the works of art. The teachers help their students to respond to the art, encouraging them to use appropriate language. The teachers help their students to 'unpack' the meaning/s contained within the works.
- The students make notes of their ideas, feelings and the language they associate with a particular work.
To help all this happen the teachers may use support materials provided online in the 'Unpacking Art' and 'Unpacking AGSA' resources via the Learning link on the Art Gallery website www.artgallery.sa.gov.au
- The ideas and notes are then taken back to school where the students write a proposed label for display in the Gallery. The teachers can suggest a number of ways in which the labels can be written. For example the students might write a poem, an 'Art critic's' view, a review, personal opinion, or imaginary dialogue. Teachers can help their students with the process of refining, editing and polishing their writing. The student's written work is then sent by fax or email to Education Services for the selection process.

The student wall labels will be rotated each Term. The deadlines for entries for 2010 are: 18 June, 24 September, 26 November.



Education Services encourage early entries.

All entries must include the name and age of the student, the school, and teacher contact details.

Entries must be no more than 50 words in length.

The selected student writing will hang alongside Art Gallery of South Australia's curators' wall labels. The student's name and age will be displayed with their Art Gallery of South Australia label. The teachers of students selected to exhibit their work on a label will be informed. Certificates will be issued to all participating students.

We hope that the promotion of a student 'voice' in the Art Gallery will provide new insights and information for all Gallery visitors, both adult and children.

Education Services look forward to your participation in this Small Talk label program.

Please contact Mark Fischer or Karina Morgan for more information.

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Images: (front) The pinch of poverty, 1889, Thomas Benjamin KENNINGTON, Britain, 1856-1916, Gift of Charles Drew 1889; (page 2) Education Guide, Kirsty, with Tintinara Area School; (page 3) Mark Fischer with St Joseph's School.



Outreach Education is a partnership program between major public institutions and the Department of Education and Children's Services. It is managed through the Open Access College, the government school of distance education.



Fish catch and Dawes Point, Sydney Harbour c1813, Sydney
John William LEWIN

Australia, 1770-1819

Gift of the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation and Southcorp Holdings Limited on the occasion of the Company's Centenary 1988

The artist John Lewin was a trained natural history painter who made many illustrations of Australian flora and fauna. Several kinds of fish Lewin officially discovered were named after him, and among them was a hammerhead shark. Its official (scientific) name is *Sphyrna Lewini*.

This is the first known oil painting to be made in Australia. The fish species in this still-life arrangement have all been identified. From the top: snapper, hammerhead shark, crimson squirrel-fish, estuary perch, rainbow wrasse and sea mullet.

Focus

- How many of the listed fish do you recognise?
- What story do you think is being told by the artist?
- What impression does this realistic painting of 'dead fish' painting leave on you?

Later

- Imagine that you have just caught these fish at Dawes Point, on Sydney Harbour. Write a wall label about your day of fishing with your friends.



Evening shadows, backwater of the Murray, South Australia
1880

H.J JOHNSTONE

1835-1907

Gift of Mr Henry Yorke Sparks 1881

This painting shows a twilight scene along a backwater of the Murray River. There are Aboriginal people in their bark dwelling, and standing by the water. It was the first painting to enter the Gallery's collection and is the most copied. The artist painted one or two very similar works as well.

It is an extremely smooth and realistic painting. Johnstone was a clever photographer who painted many of his works from photographs. It is thought he painted this in London or Paris. This was unusual for the time.

Compare the way 'Evening Shadows' is painted with some of the other Australian works you look at today.

Focus

- How was the paint applied?
- Are the colours bright or subdued?
- Describe how this use of colour makes you feel.
- Observe the people in the painting. What are they doing?
What mood does the scene set?



The First Lesson

1857, Adelaide

Charles HILL

Australia, 1891-1951

Gift of Mrs I Ruck 1966

The wife of the artist is shown with three of her children at the door of their home. An Aboriginal woman has asked for food, and the mother is teaching her eldest child Henrietta about the way a good Christian 'gives to the poor and does charitable works'. Henrietta's younger brother Charles peeps around the corner of his mother's skirts.

This family and many like it would have found it difficult to accept at the time that colonial settlement and the clearance of Aboriginal land had created a situation where Aboriginal people were forced to beg for food.

Focus

- What do you think Henrietta might have been thinking or feeling during her lesson in 1857?
- Has Hill's story made you think about the importance of sharing and giving to people less fortunate than ourselves?

Later

- Research traditional 'hunting and gathering' practices.
- The bread being offered to this woman has lard spread onto it. Find out what, and how lard is made.
- What might have been the impact of forced change of diet on the health of Aboriginal people at this time?



A holiday at Mentone

1888

Charles CONDER

Australia, 1868-1909

South Australian Government Grant with the assistance of Bond Corporation Holdings Limited through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation to mark the Gallery's Centenary 1981

Charles Conder became a friend and painting companion of Tom Roberts. Roberts met Conder in Sydney and invited him to join a group of artists camping and painting outdoors around Melbourne.

Mentone was a popular sea-side spot for people living in Melbourne. In this painting people have caught the train down for the day and are dressed 1880s style!

Conder used techniques learnt from Roberts, such as using jetties to divide up the composition into smaller sections. An Impressionist device was to use mauves and blues in the shadowing, replacing the browns and blacks that had been used in earlier Colonial works. Conder added something which was contemporary to the time. The woman in the foreground is reading a newspaper called 'The Bulletin'.

Focus

- Imagine the same scene today. What changes might there be?
- Notice how Conder has used perspective in his work of art.
Can you find the horizon line and vanishing point in the painting?
- Notice Conder's use of colour. List the primary and secondary colours Conder has used to animate the painting.



A break away!

1891

Tom ROBERTS

Australia, 1856-1931

Elder Bequest Fund 1899

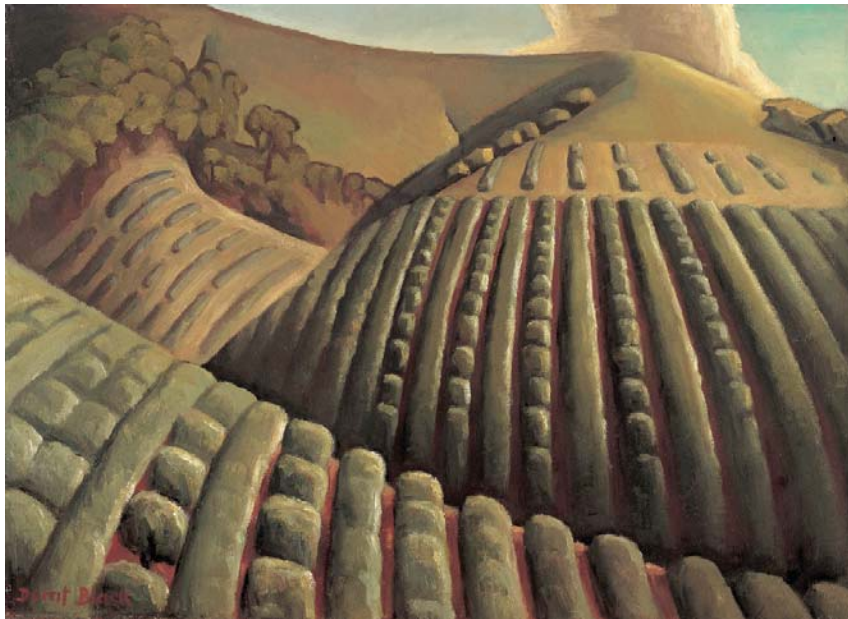
This work was painted in a shearing shed in the Riverina, New South Wales. It is very much a 'country' painting. The subject is a stampede of sheep racing towards the dam at the bottom right. If the stockman riding away from us is unsuccessful in 'cutting them off', many sheep will be crushed and drown in the dam.

Roberts never saw this 'break away' happen. He travelled through the area and camped out with drovers - who told him yarns of adventures in the bush.

Roberts drew the stockman from a 'model'. He paid a man to sit on a box with arm and leg outstretched while he drew him in his studio. Some critics at the time didn't like this painting because it looked 'too Australian' and the composition (arrangement of everything) was too loose. What do you think this means?

Focus

- This is a drought landscape. How has the artist indicated this?
- Imagine you are one of the stockmen. What thoughts are going through your mind right now?
- Roberts' *A break away!* is an Australian icon. What does this mean?
- The 'real Aussie' is a bushman. It is a man (not a woman). What do you think of this statement?
- After the European explorers came the pastoralists with their sheep, cattle and fences. The inland, even by the turn of the century, retreated further towards Australia's 'Dead Heart'. What does this term mean?
- Some people say that the 'real' Australia is inland, not on the coast. What do you think?



The Olive Plantation

1946

Dorrit BLACK

1891-1951

Bequest of the artist 1951

Adelaide-born Dorrit Black travelled overseas in the early part of last century and studied in both London and Paris. Her training in Cubist art influenced her style.

The subject of 'The Olive Plantation' is olive groves in the Adelaide foothills at Magill. Dorrit Black has not painted this work to look very real, as in a photo.

The artist has focused on the sculptural forms of the hillsides and the rows of trees. By reducing details, simplifying the colour scheme, and adding dramatic interest by use of light and shade, she has made this work into what we call a modern work of art.

Look for the strong sense of movement created by repeated patterns and curves. The shape of each olive tree has been simplified (i.e the details are left out). Notice how the artist has made it easy to see the overall patterns of the plantation. She has simplified forms and used bright flat colours.

Focus

- Create a list of the things you can see in this painting.
- The cloud on the horizon takes the eye back to the vanishing point.
- Describe how the rows of olive trees help to show perspective in the work.
- Are there any other works by Dorrit Black near this one? Is her style in these works similar or different?



The Bridge

1930, Sydney

Dorrit BLACK

Australia, 1891-1951

Bequest of the artist 1951

Dorrit Black was an Australian modernist painter who was born and died in Adelaide. Her painting shows a new way of depicting shapes. Instead of being rounded and natural there is a geometric shape to the land, the trees, and the buildings. The bridge is of course geometric in shape.

Spanish artist, Pablo Picasso, had earlier introduced the style of Cubism to painting, and Black had studied his work in France. She was also aware of painters such as Cezanne who used geometric shapes.

The Sydney Harbour Bridge is the world's largest steel arch bridge. The two half arches were held back in the construction phase by steel cables anchored underground. On one of the arches a creeper crane can be seen at work. Two cranes working from either side travelled slowly forward, laying arch sections in front of them as they progressed. As the two sections grew closer together excitement grew. Some people thought that when the last section was put into place the Bridge would collapse into the Harbour!

For many Australians at the time, the Bridge became a symbol of Australia as a modern, 'can do' nation. The Bridge was a very popular subject for artists at this time. It was seen as a symbol of the new Nationalism which emerged in Australia after World War I.

Focus

When this was painted it was considered to be among the most modern paintings in Australian art.

- Do you think it looks modern now? Is the subject easily recognised?
- Look at the different shapes Black used. Make a list of all the geometric, organic and abstract shapes you can find in this painting.

Later

- Research the design and construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.
- Write a wall label about this Australian icon.



Landscape at Pentecost

1929, Sydney

Grace COSSINGTON SMITH

Australia, 1892-1984

South Australian Government Grant 1981

Grace Cossington Smith was one of a number of Australian artists who early last century experimented with new forms of art expression. This style of art was given a general name, *modern art*. Modern artists used colour in the same way that composers use musical notes. In this painting the natural colours of the ground, grass and sky have been exaggerated to give the picture more energy. The warm, earthy colours of the road are balanced by the cool greens and blues of the hillsides.

All two-dimensional images such as paintings have a sense of space or distance. In traditional paintings this space is usually deep. Things look close or distant, or look solid or three-dimensional. In modern style paintings this space is flattened. Here are some of the things the artist has done to give the work of art a flatter or more designed look:

- creating outlines around the edges of things
- using brush strokes to make strong surface patterns
- using thick or wide brushes.

This painting uses traditional approaches to composition in that nearest things are the largest and sit at the bottom of the picture, and distant things are placed higher. Notice how the composition is divided into three parts: the road up close, the farmland and hillsides in the middle distance, and the sky. Objects become smaller the closer they are to the vanishing point. The vanishing point sits on the horizon line.

Focus

- Can you locate the horizon line and vanishing point in this painting?
- Just imagine all the lines, outlines and edges in this painting are roadways for your eyes to travel on. Start anywhere and see how far you can travel without taking your eyes off the painting.
- Can you find the techniques the artist has used to create a modern style, flattened painting?
- The road is important in this composition. Why do you think this is?



Recollection of the artist as a small boy riding a goat

1942-43, Melbourne

John PERCEVAL

Australia, 1923-2000

Acquired 1993

This painting shows a little boy riding a goat, although it does not look exactly like a goat. As the title implies it is a story the artist recalls when he was a young boy.

It is set in a farmyard scene perhaps similar to the farm where Perceval grew up in Western Australia, and where his father grew wheat. The old man with the cart seems to have bags of something on his cart, and it could be wheat. While some objects in the painting look to be real, the dogs and the black chook for instance, the goat, the pig and the boy have strange toothy grins. The little boy stares at us. It is difficult to say if he is happy or sad. The artist is known to have had a sad childhood.

Perceval later made many ceramic angels that resemble the boy in the picture. Can you find one of these angel sculptures nearby?

Focus

- How does this painting make you feel?
- Describe the texture used by Perceval to create this painting.
- What story does it tell you about the artist's childhood?
- Perceval was a friend of artist Arthur Boyd. Does the painting look like Arthur Boyd's work or Albert Tucker's?
- Look at other works of art in this Gallery. They all belonged to a group of artists who were affected by the Great Depression and the Second World War. They also followed the style of work favoured by German painters called Expressionists. One of the points of their work is that they show emotion. Do you get a sense of this?

Later

- Recount a story about something that made you happy when you were younger.



Installation photo of works by
Sidney NOLAN

Australia, 1917-1992

Gift of Sidney & Cynthia Nolan 1974

Sidney Nolan was an artist with a wide range of interests, and this is reflected in his art. He experimented with different forms and styles, including portraits, landscapes, narrative paintings, in abstract, surrealist and expressionist styles.

These 'heads' are of people the artist knew – friends, other artists, writers. Nolan painted these 'heads' at Heide. Here he was free to draw and paint, and also to enjoy the country life. This tranquil environment was important for his artistic endeavours.

Nolan used a paint called Ripolin and Dulux enamel house paint, bought at the local hardware shop. This was a paint which was generally used on houses and boats. Ripolin had a glossy effect which Nolan particularly liked (it was very luminous) but it was also very 'fluid' and dried quickly, so he had to work rapidly. He worked generally on boards from packing cases, or on cardboard. Sometimes he laid his canvases flat to minimize the likelihood of the paint running.

Sometimes these works of art are referred to as 'heads' rather than portraits. What's the difference? A portrait is painted from life or perhaps from a photographic image, whereas a 'head' is drawn from memory. Nolan drew these heads from recollections of his friends, rather than having them 'sit' for him.

Focus

- What do you think Nolan was trying to capture in these images?
Can you get a sense of emotions, or personalities?
- Have you ever drawn or painted or taken a photo of a portrait?
If you were painting a portrait of yourself, what features would you concentrate on? Would you try to paint an accurate likeness?
- Nolan's early works of art were sometimes labelled 'avant garde'.
Do you know what this term means?



Yawk yawk (mermaid figures)

1994, Barridjowkkeng, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory

Owen YALANDJA

Australia, born 1960

Gift of the Friends of the Art Gallery of South Australia 1995

These three mermaid installation sculptures are suspended over the stairwell. This gives them an unearthly mood, essential for these aquatic spirits. These are contemporary works of art due to their size and decoration. Traditional Aboriginal sculptures are generally smaller.

Mermaids are commonly known around the world as 'young women with fish tails'. In this Aboriginal story the mermaids are associated with the Rainbow Serpent, Ngalyod, as they share the same sacred water holes. One of the stories is that the Ngalyod surprised some women when he sneaked up and frightened them. The women escaped by jumping into a nearby waterhole. This caused them to develop fish tails. It is also said that the Ngalyod is the protector of these mermaids. The Rainbow Serpent, besides being the creator spirit, is also the law giver and controls the seasons, particularly the monsoons. Consequently, he is given due honour and respect. The Aboriginal people are very careful not to break his taboos, as they fear his revenge.

Focus

- Can you see that the artist has been innovative by combining the traditional manner of solid colour with fill-in dots for the upper half and used the x-ray manner of the Western Desert clans for the lower half?

Later

- Locate Arnhem Land on a map of Australia.
- Draw or paint your interpretation of this Creation story.