

# Water



Water is one of our most precious resources. It is essential for life and survival, and also for cultural and artistic expression. Water is vital for human needs, for homes and gardens, for agriculture, industry, and the environment. It can provide a means of transportation, and is also a focus for leisure, social and sporting activities.

Water is essential too for our health and our economy. Australia is the driest inhabited continent in the world, and it is important that we protect this precious resource and ensure a sustainable water future.

This trail will take students to works of art that connect with the theme of water. Art works about the sea, coast, rivers, creeks, lakes, and dams, as well as the fauna and flora inhabiting these areas which serve as inspiration for artists, also provide a setting for, or window on, social history and cultural traditions in our country.

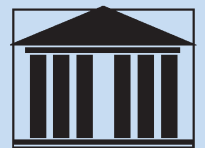
There are many themes that connect with the subject of water, including

- the environment
- transportation
- industry and trade (agriculture, food production, and manufacturing)
- leisure and sporting activity

Only 1% of the world's water is fresh water, and not all of this can be used by humans as some is located deep under ground, and some may be too polluted. In Australia, freshwater comes from surface water (rainfall and run-off into streams, dams, rivers and lakes), and groundwater (water from underground sources).

Selected works of art from the Art Gallery of SA

Image: *Evening shadows, backwater of the Murray, South Australia, 1880*, H.J. JOHNSTONE, 1835-1907, Gift of Mr Henry Yorke Sparks, 1881, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide



**ART GALLERY  
OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

Outreach Education is a team of DECS teachers based in major South Australian public organisations. The role of each teacher is to initiate, create and manage curriculum based programs for the R - 12 school sector using the expertise, collections and events at each unique site.



### Napier WALLER

Australia, 1893-1972

#### *The Pastoral Pursuits of Australia*

1927, Melbourne, oil on canvas

James & Diana Ramsay Fund 1987, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Courtesy of the Trustees of the Waller Estate

### Focus

*This is an idyllic environment unlike that shown in *A break away!* by Tom Roberts which you will see later when you move through the Gallery. Compare these two paintings in terms of environment and availability and use of water.*

This is a large neoclassical mural painted in 1927 showing Australia as a land of great wealth, abundance, a place of happiness and contentment. The work was designed to inspire and encourage national pride. At the time it was painted Australia had emerged from World War 1 with a new, positive and confident perception of itself.

Australia is shown as an Arcadia. Arcadia is a mountainous region of ancient Greece traditionally known for the contented pastoral lifestyle of its people, a place offering peace and simplicity. Arcadian images usually include classical sculptural poses, ancient Greek costumes, and classical ruins.

Napier Waller is considered Australia's finest mural painter. When he lost his right arm during World War 1 he had to re-learn to write, paint and draw with his left hand. He designed this work which consists of five panels (of which three are displayed in the Gallery vestibule) for the grand dining room of the Menzies Hotel in Melbourne. The hotel was where many wealthy farmers and graziers stayed during visits to the city. They would have enjoyed and been inspired by these images of pastoral life. The hotel was demolished in the late 1960s. By this time Waller's work had been removed and sold.

The landscape in the painting looks similar to the sheep grazing district in Western Victoria where the artist was born and raised. The shores of a lake or river can be seen in the background flowing through pastoral land. It is a scene of plenty in which water is a vital element, needed for human survival.



### John GLOVER

Britain/Australia, 1767–1849

#### *A View of the artist's house and garden, in Mills Plains, Van Diemen's Land*

1835, Deddington, Tasmania  
oil on canvas

Morgan Thomas Bequest Fund 1951, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

English artist John Glover migrated to Tasmania from his home in London in 1830. He bought land and set up a farm near Launceston.

Glover's Tasmanian landscapes often showed his liking for the natural bushland, and his interest in the disappearing indigenous peoples who once lived on the land he now owned.

This painting shows a summer's day at Glover's new farm. A shingle-roofed stone house and wooden studio look out onto his extensive cottage garden full of flowering plants. The size of this garden shows Glover's dedication to familiar plants from his home country. He had brought plants and seeds with him on the long journey in a sailing ship, and planned the garden while on the ship, even though a fellow passenger's monkey ate many of his seedlings.

Glover painted the natural bushland beyond the edges of his garden. The hilly bushland shows the soft olive greens of the Tasmanian manna gum trees. At the front of the garden we see he has made formal pathways, and a small pond or lake, and there is a vegetable plot to the right of the house.

Glover's garden is a display of introduced plants thriving in their new environment. Some of them are easy to identify: willows, roses and hollyhocks.

Most of Australia's problem weeds began as escaped garden plants introduced by immigrants, travellers, and later by plant nurseries. Weeds often threatened and smothered the growth of native plants by doing too well in this new country.

### Focus

*Look closely at the painting. Where do you think the water for both household use, and the garden, came from?*

*Would any part of Glover's garden have needed more water than other parts? Do non-native plants have the same water needs as the native plants?*

*Find out how South Australians are now adapting to limited water supplies and changing water regulations.*

*We use water in our homes for washing, cooking, cleaning and gardening. Water comes into our properties through underground pipes. Drains take away the dirty water. Visit the SA Water website to find out how we can use water more efficiently.*

*[www.sawater.com.au/interactivehouse](http://www.sawater.com.au/interactivehouse)*



**John William LEWIN**

Australia, 1770–1819

*Fish catch and Dawes Point, Sydney Harbour*

c.1813, Sydney

oil on canvas

Gift of the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation and South Australian Brewing Holdings Limited 1989, Given to mark the occasion of the Company's 1988 Centenary, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

## Focus

*How many of the fish do you recognise?*

*One of the fish is an estuary perch. What is an estuary?*

*There are many different ways that humans catch fish, from using nets to deep sea trawling. Research the impact of over-fishing on our rivers and oceans.*

*What bodies of water in South Australia provide varieties of fish for us to eat?*

This is the first known oil painting to be made in Australia and was painted in Sydney about 1813. It is a still life painting by John Lewin depicting species of fish found in Australian waters. The life-size fish in this arrangement have all been identified. From the top they are snapper, hammerhead shark, crimson squirrel-fish, estuary perch, rainbow wrasse and sea mullet.

Fish can live anywhere there is water – oceans, freshwater lakes and rivers. Fish come in many different sizes and there are more than 13,000 kinds of fish. Most swim and live near the surface; others live deeper, and a few actually live on the ocean floor.

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

The sea and associated harbours and rivers are sources of food, especially important for the early settlers inhabiting Sydney at this time.



attributed to Trucaninny (Trugernanner/Truganini)  
Australia, born Bruny Island, Tasmania c1812, died Hobart 1876

**Shell necklace**

late 19th century, Tasmania  
acmaea marginate, rishells  
On loan from the South Australian Museum

The knowledge and skills of shell gathering and weaving are cultural traditions passed down by Aboriginal women through generations. Shell necklace making is a delicate and labour-intensive process of collecting, cleaning, sorting and stringing shells. It requires great skill and patience as well as knowledge of coastal resources. The making of necklaces is dependant on the availability of shells. Shell collecting along Tasmania's beaches remains a seasonal activity.

Before European settlement Aboriginal women would smoke the shells over a fire, and then rub off the outer coating in grass to reveal a pearly surface which was later polished with penguin or mutton bird oil. After piercing each shell with a tool made from the bone of an animal such as a kangaroo or wallaby, the shells were threaded and strung on fine sinews from a kangaroo's tail, or on string made from natural fibres.

Strings of shells were of great value, and as well as being made for ceremonial adornment, they were also used as items of trade. Many of the shells have become scarce and today the shells most treasured are the green maireener shells. These days it takes two years to collect enough to make a long necklace. Necklaces are now used almost entirely for decoration and the women who collect the shells are vitally aware of sustaining the supply for future makers.

**Focus**

*Why do you think the shells, and others like them, are becoming harder to find?*

*Look around the room for other shell necklaces. Notice what they have in common, but also how they are different.*

*What other plant or animal material found in the sea or on the beach can be made into necklaces, or other decorative objects?*



**Minimini MAMARIKA**

Australia, 1904 - 1972  
 Anindilyakwa people, Northern Territory

***The Malay prau***

1948, Umbakumba, Groote Eylandt, Northern Territory  
 natural pigments on eucalyptus bark  
 Gift of Mr Charles P. Mountford 1960, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide  
 © Estate of the artist, Licensed by Aboriginal Artists Agency, 2011

**Focus**

*What other sea creatures might be a source of food for people in this area?*

*What navigation 'tools' might have been used by these early traders?*

*As you walk through the Gallery, look for other works that show sea travel and trade.*

This work represents how water is important for trade and cultural contact between peoples. It shows a Malay sailing boat or prau. From at least the early 1700s until the early 1900s, men from Macassar (Sulawesi), part of Indonesia, sailed to northern Australia each year to gather trepang (sea cucumber), a seafood delicacy traded to China.

The Macassans established trading and cultural relations with Aboriginal people from northern coastal areas. Exchanges were made of exotic materials such as cloth, metal knives and axes, rice and tobacco. This was Australia's first export industry.

Many Aboriginal men also travelled across the water to Macassar (particularly to Ujung Pandang, on Sulawesi) after the wet season's harvest of sea cucumber. On Groote Eylandt, off the northern Australian coast, Macassan influences remain in language, landscape and beliefs through introduced words and plants, incorporation of boats into creation stories, and the adoption of boat and wind 'totems'.



after Thomas WATLING

Australia, 1762 c1814

*View of the town of Sydney in the colony of New South Wales*

c.1799, probably painted in Britain from sketches

made in Sydney

oil on canvas

M.J.M. Carter AO Collection

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

At the time of European settlement when Captain Arthur Phillip and the First Fleet arrived from England on January 26, 1788, about 34 Aboriginal groups lived in the Sydney region close to waterways such as the Parramatta River. Aboriginal people had managed the water sustainably for thousands of years, and were careful not to pollute the water supplies which provided fresh drinking water, and supported food such as fish, crustaceans and birds.

The first managed water supplies for Sydney's colonial population were holding tanks cut into the Tank Stream that flowed through the settlement into Sydney Harbour, at Circular Quay. By 1826 the stream was polluted with sewage and rubbish and was abandoned in favour of water from Busby's Bore, a convict-built tunnel from Lachlan swamps to Hyde Park. The water was distributed throughout the city by water carts.

All cities, towns, and settlements have to manage water. Over time they have developed complex systems for collecting, distributing and treating water for people's needs. Using stormwater, rainwater tanks, desalination plants, and recycling, means that communities can reduce their reliance on rivers and dams for water supplies.

## Focus

*What can you see in the painting that would need/use water?*

*How would the water for household use have been collected at this time?*

*This is a painting about the past, about arriving in a new colony and having to start everything from scratch. When new towns or cities are developed and settled now, the problem remains of providing water and sewage to households. Most Australian cities are centred on natural water features such as deep harbours, and rivers. But some water needs to come a long way. Where does Adelaide's water come from? And what happens to Adelaide's stormwater and sewage?*



**Isaac WHITEHEAD**

Australia, 1819 - 1881

*In the Sassafras Valley, Victoria*

1875, Melbourne

oil on canvas

M.J.M. Carter AO Collection and the South Australian Government 1996  
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

**Focus**

*What happens to these micro-environments when old growth forests are cut down?*

*How much rainfall a year does a rainforest require to survive? Are there any rainforests in South Australia?*

Isaac Whitehead painted this large landscape to show the scale and mystery of the magnificent forests of the Dandenong Ranges, east of Melbourne. He was interested in showing how the Australian landscape matched the imaginations and perceptions of its European settlers, as being an ancient and impenetrable wilderness.

The painting shows a thickly-wooded forest valley where the undergrowth is damp and ferny. There is a crystal clear creek shaded by huge, ancient eucalypt trees. Many micro-environments exist within the general forest area here.

Tiny figures of loggers clamber over mossy logs. The figures are dwarfed by the towering trunks around them. This painting was originally titled 'Victorian Forest with Loggers'. Unlicensed loggers were starting to degrade the forest by cutting down these giant, old-growth trees for their valuable timber. Australia's new furniture and building industries depended on these beautiful timbers.

In this work Whitehead was responding to an international mania for ferns from the Dandenongs. Ferns were so popular that patterns and images of them were often incorporated into decorative arts in silverware, pottery and textiles. Look around the room to see some of these objects.

People are drawn to watery locations, and will picnic, bushwalk and camp by rivers, dams and in rainforests. Some people also enjoy such locations for bird-watching and animal-spotting.



### Conrad MARTENS

Australia, 1801 - 1878

#### *Stalagmite columns at the southern entrance of the Burrangalong Cavern*

1843, New South Wales

oil on canvas

M.J.M. Carter AO Collection through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation to mark the Gallery's 125th anniversary 2006, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

This is an unusual landscape painting as it has no horizon and very little vegetation. It is dominated by dramatic shapes. The darkness of the cave emphasises the lighter stalagmites, columns, and cliff face. The artist has included several tiny figures and dogs to convey the scale of the giant cavern entrance.

Conrad Martens painted this cave system only three weeks after it had been found by explorers, south of Bathurst, in New South Wales. New discoveries such as this stimulated visits by inquisitive tourists and artists.

Cave systems are labyrinths of underground erosion, created over millions of years by water seeping, dripping and running through cracks from above. The moving water dissolves minerals from the soil and rock, carrying them along in underground streams. These minerals are often deposited along the way, dropped by slowly moving water to build dramatic forms inside the caves.

Water dripping downwards from a drip point can make hanging 'fingers' of new rock-like icicles, called stalactites. Below the drip point the same dripping will build up stone fingers called stalagmites. Sometimes these two meet in the middle to make columns.

### Focus

*Wherever it travels, water carries chemicals, minerals and nutrients. Find out what minerals dissolve and rebuild to form stalactites and stalagmites.*

*Think about ways in which water forms or changes landscapes. Choose a particular South Australian landscape - for example the Flinders Ranges, the Murray mouth, Naracoorte Caves, or a coastal area, and consider how water has played a part in its formation.*



**H J JOHNSTONE**

Australia, 1835 -1907

*Evening shadows, backwater of the Murray, South Australia*

1880, London

oil on canvas

Gift of Mr Henry Yorke Sparks 1881

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

This painting shows how artists are inspired by the mirroring and reflecting qualities of water.

Aboriginal people have lived in the Murray-Darling River area for thousands of years, understanding how to live sustainably with the land and the river's cycles of flood and drought. The river has provided them with food such as fish and birds, while the giant river red gums have provided the bark needed for canoes and for shelter.

This painting shows a twilight scene along a backwater of the Murray River in the late 19th Century. There are Aboriginal people in their bark dwelling, and also standing by the water.

The Murray-Darling is Australia's largest and greatest river system. It collects the water that drains from parts of Queensland, New South Wales, The Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, and South Australia. The water flows out to sea at Goolwa in South Australia.

The two major rivers in the Murray-Darling system are the Darling, which is 2,740km long, and the Murray, which is 2,520 km long. The system includes 23 rivers in all.

The Murray-Darling is home to hundreds of species of native fauna and flora which rely on the seasonal flooding of the river system. The area is also home to over two million people. It is Australia's most important agricultural region, producing over one third of Australia's food supply. Nearly three quarters of the irrigation in Australia occurs in the Murray-Darling Basin.

**Focus**

*How did the Murray and Darling Rivers get their names?*

*Imagine this landscape with hardly any water. What would happen to a 'backwater' in a time of drought?*

*Later, at school, locate the Murray-Darling Basin on a map or use Google Earth.*

*The system includes 23 rivers. Apart from the Murray and the Darling, what are the other rivers that drain it?*

*Murray-Darling Basin Authority  
www.mdba.gov.au*

*There is a long history of environmental problems in the Murray-Darling Basin. There are a number of possible areas of research for students:*

1. salinity
2. algal blooms
3. the impact of the introduction of the European carp
4. irrigation



### James SHAW

Australia, 1815 - 1881

#### *The Admella*

1858, Adelaide

oil on canvas

South Australian Government Grant 1977, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

James Shaw was one of colonial South Australia's most enterprising artists. He was self-trained as a photographer and painter, and used both skills to record many early events in South Australia. This painting shows a ship wrecked on a reef, and being torn apart by huge waves.

This was a significant event in colonial South Australian maritime history. The Admella was a "steam-sailer", that is it could travel under sail but also as a coal-fuelled steamer. It had three watertight bulkheads (similar to those on the Titanic) and was the most technologically advanced ship of her time, and was thought to be unsinkable.

Travelling by sea was the quickest and most comfortable choice for early colonial travellers. When the Admella was commissioned she was a popular choice of transport, and made regular runs between Adelaide, Melbourne and Launceston. (Thus its name).

The Admella was travelling from Port Adelaide to Melbourne on the night of 6th August 1846 when it ran aground across the reef of Carpenter's Rocks off the lower south-east coast of South Australia near present-day Mount Gambier. Ships in those days didn't have good compasses or maps. There weren't many lighthouses, and no radio to signal for help.

Passengers and crew clinging to the wreckage had no water and very little food. Captain McEwan shared out what food remained and had to prevent survivors from drinking salt water, which had begun to take the lives of those who drank it.

Survivors clung to the wreckage for eight days before being rescued. Only 24 people from a total of 113 survived.

### Focus

*Find out how long humans can survive without water.*

*Why can't we drink seawater?*

*Research how sea water can be turned into drinking water.*



**Tom ROBERTS**

Australia, 1856 - 1931

***A break away!***

1891, Corowa, New South Wales and Melbourne, Victoria

oil on canvas

Elder Bequest Fund 1899, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

**Focus**

*This is a drought landscape. How has the artist indicated this? Are droughts occurring more often in Australia?*

*A sheep needs 4 to 10 litres of water a day! How many litres of water a day do you need?*

*How do sheep graziers now manage, or provide water for, their sheep in times of drought?*

*Roberts' 'A break away!' is considered an Australian icon. What does this mean?*

This painting is about the absence of water. It had not rained for a very long time in Victoria at the time this painting was done, and the artist shows a hot, dry, thirsty land. It was painted in a shearing shed in the Riverina district, New South Wales. It is very much a 'country' painting. The artist portrays a stampede of sheep towards water at the bottom right of the painting. If the stockman in the foreground is unsuccessful in 'cutting them off', many sheep may be crushed or drowned.

The artist never saw this 'break away' happen. He travelled through outback Victoria and camped out with the drovers, who told him about life on the land. Using these stories and his own experiences as inspiration, he created the painting.

Some critics at the time didn't like this painting because it looked 'too Australian'. They thought it would give people overseas a negative impression of Australia.



### Charles CONDER

Australia/Britain, 1868–1909

#### *A holiday at Mentone*

1888, Melbourne

oil on canvas

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  
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

This painting celebrates leisure culture, the joys of the beach and the Australian sunlight. It shows the popular beach of Mentone near Melbourne on a bright sunny day in 1888. A day at the beach was a popular activity at the time, and people in this painting have caught the train down for the day to relax and walk on the promenade.

At the time, men and women had to swim separately in bathing enclosures, such as that shown (in part) at the right of the work. Between sunrise and sunset only gentle paddling was considered respectable.

The beach today has come to symbolise the Australian way of life – pleasure, freedom, independence and enjoyment. It is an important part of our national identity and culture. Australians love the coast, with many taking beach holidays and owning seaside shacks and holiday houses.

Did you know that the Australian coastline stretches over a distance of more than 36,000 kilometres?

### Focus

*Water is a key element for many recreation activities. List activities that you can undertake at the beach or along the coast.*

*The water can be a source of fun, but can also be dangerous. Ocean currents are not always predictable. Did you know that Australia was the first place in the world to have surf life-saving clubs? The Bondi Surf Bathers Life-saving Club established in 1906 was soon followed by hundreds more around the country. Research the beginnings of the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia.*

*Beaches are made up of sand or small rocks and pebbles that have been washed up or blown along the shore. How does erosion occur at the beach? How might the shape of beaches change with continued erosion?*

*Developments along the coastline have caused coastal erosion and sand loss. This has endangered coastal habitats and is very expensive to manage. How is coastal erosion managed in South Australia?*



**Clarice BECKETT**

Australia, 1887 – 1935

*(detail) Passing trams*

c.1931, Melbourne

oil on board

Edna Berniece Harrison Bequest Fund through the Friends of the Art Gallery of SA 2001  
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

**Focus**

*There is a fixed amount of water on earth and it is constantly moving from one place to another in a process called the water cycle or hydrological cycle. The water cycle works when water evaporates from oceans, rivers and vegetation into the air as water vapour, which builds up forming fog, mist or clouds. Air temperature and pressure cause the clouds to rain and water falls back down to the ground.*

*At school, draw the water cycle showing evaporation, condensation, precipitation and collection/run-off.*

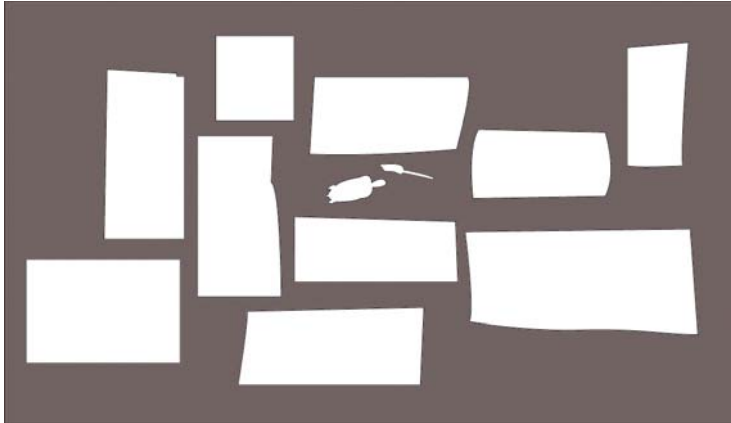
*Where are mist and fog (as in 'Passing trams') on this cycle?*

Water is not always visible as ocean, lake or river. Sometimes it is less obvious, as Clarice Beckett's paintings often show.

Clarice Beckett is recognised as one of Australia's most important Modernist artists. Her paintings are 'everyday' landscapes: suburban scenes that feature fog, mist, or rain often suggesting an illusion of reality.

Beckett often walked the streets and cliff tops near her seaside home with her painting cart loaded with easel, paint and canvasses. She painted incessantly, and in all weathers. She died at the age of 45 after contracting pneumonia following a spell of painting outside during a storm.

Beckett's favoured painting 'times' were dawn and dusk. Her paintings often seem blurry, foggy or misty; objects are made shiny - and different - by rain. This painting shows a Melbourne city streetscape in mist and fog. Fog is tiny droplets of water which are light enough to float in the air.



### *Charles Mountford Collection*

(Images unavailable due to copyright restrictions)

Oceans and seas cover more than two-thirds of the Earth's surface, and contain 97 percent of all the water in the world. The oceans are filled with many living things, ranging from tiny shrimp-like creatures that float on the surface to different kinds of fish, crabs, sharks, turtles, dugongs, and whales.

In 1948 the South Australian Museum's honorary ethnologist, Charles Mountford collected hundreds of Aboriginal bark paintings and other art objects when he led the eight month American Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. Controversially, during this field trip Mountford pioneered the collecting of bark paintings as works of art, not as anthropological objects. In 1956, these bark paintings were distributed by the Commonwealth government to state art galleries and today they form the foundation of their Aboriginal art collections.

These bark paintings were created by indigenous people living by the coast, and using the surrounding waters to source food such as crabs and turtles.

### **Focus**

*How many different kinds of 'water' animals can you see?*

*Find out about the seafood gathering methods of indigenous people in the Northern Territory.*



**Catherine TRUMAN**

Australia, 1957

*Slate pool walkway*

1993 1996, Adelaide

Mintaro slate, patinated cast bronze fish, painted steel gates

South Australian Government Grant 1996, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

**Focus**

*Consider how the artist has created a visual game. You are walking on, or through, water. How has the artist made the stone slate look like water?*

*Back at school, using plasticine and/or cardboard, create your own fish or sea-creature sculpture.*

*Paint or draw an image which focuses on one of the ideas/themes explored during Water Week.*

Catherine Truman is a contemporary South Australian artist who is well known in Australia and internationally for her finely-crafted objects. The fish – a recurrent symbol in her early work – are used here by the artist as a metaphor for the human spirit.

This work provides an example of how water is an inspiration for artists. Catherine Truman has imagined playful fish leaping in and out of the water. The bronze fish seem to dive into the slate ‘pool’ or become caught in the ‘net’ of the gateway.

