



POETS PAINT WORDS II

EDUCATION KIT

Newcastle Region Art Gallery

INTRODUCTION

The following activities are designed to encourage students to critically explore the relationships between the paintings and corresponding poems of the exhibition, and to investigate the different ways the poems might have been composed.

There are a number of questions and activities that go with each painting-and-poem pair. Choose as you like from the activities, concentrating on either the more analytical questions or those that ask the students to create an imaginative composition of their own, or both.

This education resource has been developed by local poet and educator Chris Brown. We are indebted to his generosity.

Gathering

Jane Gibian

From the loamy sable soil, you're born
with fern frond and grass stalk, neck
tapered as a leaf blade. When you leave,

the stems of your limbs fall away,
husks sinking into the layers
of mellowing leaf mould and clay.

In the breadth of your mind germinates
another tree, feeding on the pabulum
of the forest floor, its branchlets ribbed

and downy, young shoots sour to chew.
A feathery cowl of lichen might adorn
your sternum, or pearled-grey stripes

spread around the trunk. Grieve less
as sorrow coils, quietening into
a continuous self. Panicles of muted

blossom erupt from your fingertips:
the cycle turns as your cortex begins
to ripen under the beetle-limbed sun.

When time is ripe for gathering loss

Peter Graham



Jane Gibian's poem develops a **lexicon** (group of words or vocabulary) distinctly to do with nature. Make a list of these words.

Where in this poem does the author seem to deal specifically with ideas of loss?

The imagery of the poem is as much to do with new life and rejuvenation as it is loss. How might a close reading of the poem support this comment?

In what ways might you personally explain the (ekphrastic) relationship between this poem and the painting by Peter Graham?

Choose any two stanzas of the poem. Take the words from these two stanzas, and rearrange the words (in any way you like) to make a poem of your own. When you have written your poem, explain the relationship between your own poem and Peter Graham's painting.

Untitled in Opening Tuning

Anthony Lawrence

The vineyard is pinstriped with light and shade, though shade is scarce. To the south, a fire will soon become a killing furnace yet here, on the last day of the first month of the year, the news is good. The Triffids play to all but empty grass. Paul Kelly's quiet set calls the faithful out from under tents and trees. When he leaves the stage it's almost dark. After the break, Leonard Cohen and his band walk out to a standing ovation. It's not the crowd but what it brings and receives that matters. The man who wears an Armani suit to sweep the floor and do his washing doffs his fedora, smiles, then steps into the opening chords of Dance Me To The End of Love. Someone nearby is sobbing. A man holds his daughter up as if to receive a blessing. When he lets her down, the bottle of Ballantines we'd smuggled in is kicked from my hand as I fill a glass. I pour another as the band goes into The Future. Cohen's sense of style and old world manners are evident and in abundance. Often, as the Shepherd of the Strings, Javier Mas is soloing on the banduria, sitting on the edge of a red armchair, Cohen kneels before him, hat in hand, watching respectfully. This gesture is afforded everyone, and often. There Ain't No Cure For Love sets the tone and spirit for the night. I overhear a woman say she'd been with him in London. He prefaces songs with stories of depression, meditation and how, in the end, after years of drugs and study, cheerfulness just kept on breaking through. After Bird on the Wire, in the first intermission, I walk through the crowd and listen. Up on the hill it seems too quiet for a concert, with people standing around as if trying to remember something they'd meant to say, or do. The stage is like a scallop shell, with dark blue screens and Cohen's own design: a heart with a hummingbird in flight above it. As he introduces The Sisters of Mercy, I want to shout something about George Johnston, but keep myself busy and in check with a bottle and a glass. Leonard Cohen knows how reclusiveness and shunning fellowship affect the head and heart. At the end of If It Be Your Will and before I Tried to Leave You, he offers his blessings to those returning with friends and family and to those going home to their solitude. Then it's over. At 74 he won't be back. Walking to the bus, I see an old friend from Wagga. He's off somewhere with the night in his head and I will not interrupt him.

Abstract No.10 1956

Ralph Balson



Anthony Lawrence's poem is a personalized, descriptive response to a much more abstract painting. It is a recount, an experience re-told by the author. Does the painting remind you of anything from your own life? Does it evoke a memory of an experience or a place? Write a short descriptive recount of your own to the painting. You might like to write in the same prose style that Lawrence uses here – that is conventional sentencing, punctuation etc.

In what ways might you personally explain the (ekphrastic) relationship between this poem and the painting by Ralph Balson?

Does Lawrence's poem really enter into dialogue with the painting. Explain your answer with reference to both painting and poem.

WHAT WE DO FOR SURVIVAL

Ivy Ireland

Green was first when the extant set out to condense itself down.
Then cinnabar: capillaries of fire and endlessness,
a nest of triangles, symbols of the Three Principles —
the Great Heart of some elapsed thing.

The only world we can cope with
is this shopping list of perceptions:
Round bottomed flask,
orphic egg, Aurora Borealis, lung sack,
runes in cubes seeming to square the circle,
Tetragrammaton in a cyclic continuum
trailing off the canvas, off this Perspex page.

Consciousness is not the only node
responding to this inoculation of meaning —
the body catches the flame, also.
Electrical signals smelt biology and chemistry
from shamanism and alchemy,
distil human genome research from arcane pixels,
coagulate white noise with all this green-black rapid change.

What lies beneath this ladder of coercion
is still beneath;
scumble-over it as we will,
set it free though we may.

Body Chart

Jon Cattapan



Ivy Ireland's poem makes clear reference to the act of ekphrasis and to the idea of her own poem flowing out of the painting it responds to. Where might this be evident in the poem?

How might the reference to mythology (shamanism and alchemy) go with the painting?

In what ways might you personally explain the (ekphrastic) relationship between this poem and the painting by Jon Cattapan?

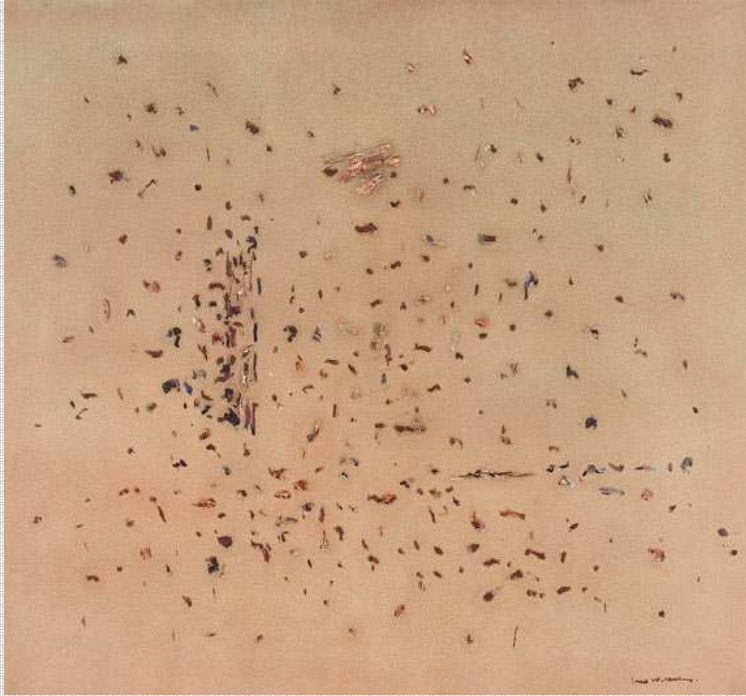
After Fred Williams' 'You Yangs'

Michael Brennan

The way spirit tracks, in brushstrokes or words, you'd have Buckley's of getting it right, sensing how out here light does not fall. Waves of images fill you so there's nothing but to paint, though you don't like it, this country that's in you, the red dust coating everything in one place or the granite now, beneath your feet an island, quartz and feldspar cooled beneath an ocean millions of years departed before your arrival. The wattle an edged blur in distance, melancholy of the sheoaks weird, almost human with arms languorous, supine to a brutality of light that in another language might be what is. Gusts gathering yellow sands, slow erosion, there is no foreground, no back, harlequin mistletoe, cherry ball art, the rock before you holding light sings like everything else here, a silence you seek out the heart of. So you work ten canvases at once though there's no focal point, no cathedral to wash time across, to track the changing planes of day, to assure meaning, only what is built out of winds and dust and rock and song now half-heard, half-dead, unlearnt names scattered on a map. The idea of elsewhere you leave behind or end up like one of those figures in a landscape pointing the way ahead, to something picturesque beyond the frame, the perspective warped by some new Eden, some ancient Arcadia waiting to be plundered, a lie like the emptiness gathered and named and transported here to build on. Your eyes trace the line of scrub, manna gums and yellow gums scrimshawing landscape, red gums sketch out a vertical line like a man practicing his whole life to say a single word, finding his bearings in a place he can only come to slowly. Crossing the lava, basalt, time uncovers you, uncovers land, an aspect of light so what you abstract is not self, not place, not moment but all these spoken by marks, scars in a greater shared immensity, a flat dun coloured space, a stillness where the delusions of horizon have been erased, skins peeled back, as if death could be cast off, its flesh left to dry in sun, and time curved on itself, a husk. You watch in tongues of light, listening with eyes, unearthing spirit amongst boneseed and sundew, perhaps love, in daubs of skyless light, learning country, speaking it as it speaks you.

You Yangs landscape

Fred Williams



Take the first and last words from each line of Michael Brennan's poem, and using those you choose, as well as adding words of your own where you need to, write a poem in response to Fred Williams' painting.

In what ways might you personally explain the (ekphrastic) relationship between this poem and the painting by Fred Williams?

What structural similarities can you see between painting and poem?

mimesis

Michael Farrell

as big as dimension or boxes
" " " trombones " condoms
can you tell how big you are?

i feel like im a policeman
" " " " " conception
" " " " " quoit
whats it like in the storeroom?

im at the pier now drying my feet
" " " ground " " " mitt
" on " porch " " " bandaid
have you been to look at the street?

meet me at the barn with old bills
" " " " " factory " the pills
" " in " bush " a rusty kettle
have you any leads?

youll find a way out at the top
" " " " " " " bottom
is a stripe bent a stripe still?

my fingers are in the controls
" " " " " mitt
" " " playing the chords
" " " swinging " kettle

Untitled

Peter Booth



In what ways might you personally explain the (ekphrastic) relationship between this poem and the painting by Peter Booth?

Here is a copy of Michael Farrell's "mimesis". Replace the underlined words with words of your own to create your own response to Michael Farrell's poem.

Michael Farrell is known to use chance as a technique in the way he creates poems. For every underlined noun in the poem, choose every sixth noun that follows it in the dictionary, until you have six nouns for each. For example: trombones: troop-carrier; trope; tropical medicine; Trotskyite; troubleshooter; trough. Number each noun one to six. Roll the dice and use the word that corresponds with the result to replace the underlined nouns in your poem.

METALAND

Kate Lilley

Telephone, bottle, stair
before and after

not Paris
not Sydney either

the shallow secret surfaces
planes of red and green

blue and ochre
figure and ground in tandem

white smudges
returning in translation

the passage is what counts
the envelopes back and forth

parcelled necessities
going here and there

Still Life

Grace Crowley



Kate Lilley's poem presents a series of spare images, possibly taken from the painting. Compile a list of fragments, thoughts and ideas based on an initial viewing of Crowley's painting. Write each idea down on a strip of paper of its own. Put the (twenty or so) ideas into a container and draw them out the first fourteen. Group them in couplets to complete your poem. Explain the relationship between your poem and the painting by Crowley.

In what ways might you personally explain the (ekphrastic) relationship between this poem and the painting by Grace Crowley?

WRITING A POEM IN RESPONSE TO...

Tim Storrier

Smoke haze over Capricorn



The following might help you to write your own ekphrastic poem:

- When did the painter paint it?
- Where was the painter when he or she painted it?
- How might a biography of the painter and/or painting assist your poem?
- Think about the cultural context in which the painting was created? What were the social and cultural attitudes of the time?
- How might the shape of the painting influence your poem?
- How might the colour imagery of the painting come across to the poem?
- What mood, emotion, or ambience surrounds the painting? This might shape the mood or tonal quality of your poem?
- What does the painting say about issues of identity, gender, age, class, race, etc.?
- Consider formal association; what things can you see in the painting and how might you be able to create parallels or analogies for these in your poem.
- Consider the possibility of free association - an intuitive, spontaneous response.
- Put together a pool or bank of words or phrases or thoughts that go with first and subsequent readings of the painting.
- Consider the different form, voice and style of the poems in the exhibition. Some of these might appeal to you as a suitable model for your own work.

LIST OF IMAGES

Front Cover

Peter Booth *Untitled* 1962
acrylic on canvas
160.0 x 267.0cm
purchased 1994
Newcastle Region Art Gallery collection

1

Peter Graham *When time is ripe for gathering loss* 2002
oil on canvas
130.0 x 107.0cm
purchased 2002
Newcastle Region Art Gallery collection

2

Ralph Balson *Abstract No.10* 1956
oil on cardboard mounted on hardboard
105.1 x 109.2
purchased 1962
Newcastle Region Art Gallery collection

3

Jon Cattapan *Body Chart* 1995
oil on canvas
195.0 x 168.0cm
purchased 1996
Newcastle Region Art Gallery collection

4

Fred Williams *You Yangs landscape* 1966
oil on canvas
91.6 x 98.4cm
gift of Rudy Komon 1969
Newcastle Region Art Gallery collection

5

Peter Booth *Untitled* 1962
acrylic on canvas
160.0 x 267.0cm
purchased 1994
Newcastle Region Art Gallery collection

6

Grace Crowley *Still life* 1938
oil on canvas
63.5 x 79.0cm
presented in 1978 by the artist
Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection

7

Tim Storrier *Smoke haze over Capricorn* 2008
acrylic on canvas
122.0 x 244.0cm
gift of the artist through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program 2009 (pending)