

EDUCATION KIT

ELISE BLUMANN: AN ÉMIGRÉ ARTIST IN
WESTERN AUSTRALIA, 1938-1948
11 JULY - 19 SEPTEMBER 2015

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

German artist Elise Blumann arrived in Perth in the summer of 1938. She was immediately struck by the local landscape and the piercing brightness of the Australian light. Her painting in the subsequent decade focused on an analysis of various plant forms surrounding her home in Nedlands, and the settings of the Swan River and the Indian Ocean, which feature prominently in her work. While including some early works produced in Europe, this exhibition focuses on paintings from the artist's first decade in Australia; the series of bold portraits produced in the late 1930s to the increasingly abstract renderings of the landscape of the late 1940s.



ABOUT THE CURATOR

Dr Sally Quin is Curator of the University of Western Australia Art Collection and Adjunct Lecturer in the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts at UWA. She received her PhD in 2004 with a thesis on the reception of early modern women artists in Italy. She has published on sixteenth-century artists, the painter-prioress Plautilla Nelli and Bolognese sculptor Properzia de' Rossi. Her curatorial work has concentrated on Australian modernist and contemporary art. Dr. Quin's research on Elise Blumann combines her interests in the historical fortunes of women artists and the cultural and social contexts of artistic production.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

For your school visit, we have a variety of resources for teachers to aid them in guiding students through the exhibition. These resources have been developed with reference to the School Curriculum and Standards Authority's Curriculum and Assessment outline, and there are many avenues through which this exhibition can be utilised to facilitate learning in the areas of Society and Environment, English, and Art. This will encourage students to develop an appreciation of the stylistic approach of a local émigré artist, which will lead to an understanding of her response to the local environment around Perth and wider Western Australia.

While in the Museum, students are encouraged to view the works on display. Upon returning to the classroom they may undertake activities related to what they saw and discussed in the gallery.

WHILE IN THE EXHIBITION ACTIVITIES K-7

Look at the pictures and find three different types (genres) of paintings.

For example, many pictures in this exhibition are either of a landscape, a human figure, or a portrait.

Discuss with your teacher and friends what you might find in each of these sorts of paintings.



FOCUS ON ONE QUESTION FOR EACH GENRE

PORTRAIT

- Choose a painting that you think is a picture of a particular person; this is a portrait.
- Share with your classmates some of the things the painting that you all think make it a portrait of a person that might be identified?
For example, if it is of a little boy choose some things about the picture that tell you about the appearance of the little boy, also discuss if you think he is happy, or is he serious?

LANDSCAPE

- What things in a picture make it a landscape?
For example it has a tree, rocks, river, plants, sky, sea.
- Can you identify a series of pictures that portray the dense bush-land near Perth?
For example, they have a lot of details like plants and rocks or branches of trees or tree trunks that seem to be close together. Can you discuss with your class how the artist makes you feel this effect of dense bushland?
- Can you find some pictures that are of the Swan River?
What does the artist do to make it seem to be of a river?
- Can you choose a picture that tells you about the weather?
Is it stormy, or bright and sunny, for example?
- Can you choose a picture that looks like it is a hot day?
For example, choose some colours in the picture that you think make it look hot and sunny?
- Can you describe what makes another picture look like it is a stormy day?
- What sorts of colours and brush marks are in these various pictures?
- Can you discuss with each other how the artist uses different colours and brush marks and arranges the forms and shapes in the pictures to express different feelings about the weather and the type of landscape?

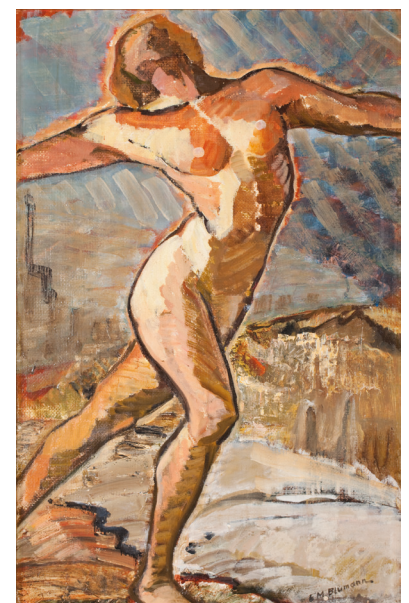
FIGURES

- Choose some pictures that are of the human figure, but seem not to be of a particular person.
What things in these pictures make it about the human figure?
For example, the main form in the painting has a human form of arms, legs, body, head.
- Can you choose one of these pictures and describe what the figure is doing?
Find one that might be dancing, another that is twisting, another that is surfing?
- What can you say about the angles of the legs and arms in relation to the body in these pictures?

CLASS ROOM ACTIVITY K-7

Draw a picture of a landscape that you know from your own experience, maybe the beach or a park that you visit.
 Tell your class what you do when you go to these places.
 What makes them special to you?
 How do you feel when you are there?
 What colours might you choose to convey this feeling in the picture?

Tell the others in your group about your favourite picture that you saw in the exhibition.
 Describe what is in the picture, what colours are used and how the paint is applied and what does it make you feel or think?



Self-portrait, 1920s, oil on board, 52.5 x 47.5 cm. Private collection. *Parents*, 1937, oil on canvas, 59.5 x 73.5 cm. Private collection. *Self-portrait*, 1937, oil on board, 52.5 x 62.5 cm. CCWA 37.
Gooseberry Hill, 1948, oil on hardboard, 76.0 x 103.4 cm Janet Holmes à Court Collection. *Dying melaleuca in Western Australia*, 1948, oil on board, 58.5 x 49.0 cm. Private collection.
Rottneest lighthouse and salt lake, 1947, oil on board, 46.5 x 54.9 cm. University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of Dr and Mrs R. K. Constable, 1985.
Surfer, 1939-1946, oil on canvas, 69.5 x 51.0 cm Private collection. *Surfer*, 1940, oil on paper, 64.0 x 51.0 cm. Private collection. *Surge*, 1943-44, oil on paper on board, 86.0 x 55.5 cm. Private collection.

WHILE IN THE EXHIBITION ACTIVITY 7-12

Note the exhibition display organisation; the paintings are arranged in the galleries to communicate three key themes and time periods of the artist's work.

1. **The Early Years in Europe;** primarily portraits - of herself and her parents.
2. **Soon after the Blumann family arrival in WA.** The early subjects are personal; Blumann painted her own family and portraits of friends; she also painted her local environment, near to their home, by the Swan River. Note the expressive mark making of the paint strokes and that the colours change from the paintings done in Europe. In Western Australia the pictures are light and bright.
3. **Later years in Western Australia.** Note the images from Gooseberry Hill: some images are landscapes including bush foliage; burnt logs; dense bush-land; there are others using vibrant colours and abstract marks, some implying banksia plant forms. Also note the paintings with figures.



FOCUS ON ARTWORKS

Look at the early pictures in the Westpac Gallery: note the two self portraits, a small watercolour of a tree (c 1913) and a portrait of Blumann's parents.

VISUAL ANALYSIS

Look at the colours used and the manner of the application of paint.

Study the style of the clothing and disposition of the figures and discuss what these aspects indicate about the situation of the people depicted.

Then look at the next series on the northern wall, painted soon after the Blumann family's arrival in Western Australia. Comment on the choice of colours; the types of images and the application of paint. What are the differences from the earlier works? Discuss what might be the reasons for these new features?

Look at the portraits. Discuss key features in the portraits. What do these indicate about the sitter's relationship to the artist? For example look at the picture of a man in a grey suit sitting in a chair. What makes you think he is relaxed?

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Choose a portrait that you like and discuss with your group the feeling of the artist towards that person, considering features that are depicted that convey this feeling.

Discuss what their social status might be, this might be identified in relationship to their clothing or the setting they are in, for example are they sitting down in a formal setting?

For those depicted within the landscape, where are they, what are they wearing? What might be their relationship to the painter?

VISUAL ANALYSIS

In the next gallery, examine the works that feature the bush-land at Gooseberry Hill. Discuss some of the pictorial elements that contribute to the understanding of the nature of the bush-land that is depicted and the mood that the artist is creating?

While you might identify the key objects or features in some pictures, the mode of painting in some may be particularly described as being abstract. Choose two pictures with plant forms that fit this description and discuss them.

Discuss the pictures of figures with others in your group and think about why there may be no details such as eyes, hands and feet in some of the pictures.

This is partly what contributes to the work being described as abstract. Look again and discuss some of the other features that lead the painting to be described as expressionist.

Is there another art form or medium that these paintings of figures bring to mind?

MEANING AND PURPOSE

Examine the landscapes that feature the Swan River. Discuss what the artist does to create the feeling of a hot and sunny day in some of them. Choose some that depict a storm on the Swan and examine the artist's choice of colour and type of brush strokes.

Discuss what you see in relation to the comments by the curator Dr Sally Quin that:

She used bold, unmodulated bands of vivid colour to suggest the flattening effects of the Western Australian light and to give expression to the broad expanses of river, sea, sky and shore.

Also the comments by the art historian Kitty Hauser that the artist captured what it was like to be standing in, not merely looking at the storm darkened landscape:

The expressionists tried to understand the relationship between subjective and objective reality.
and

They knew paint could both represent and evoke a mood.

Reference: Quoted by Victoria Laurie in 'Naked Ambition' in *The Weekend Australian: Review*, p4 July 4-5, 2015

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Tell the others in your group about your favourite picture. Describe what is in the picture, what colours are used what moods or atmosphere does this create? Discuss how the paint is applied and what this contributes to the mood of the picture.

ACTIVITIES IN THE CLASS ROOM 7-12

HISTORICAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Investigate and discuss with your classmates some of the historical and political issues influencing the lives of people in Germany and other parts of Europe in the time that Elise Blumann studied art in Berlin, also in the early years of her marriage to Arnold Blumann. Discuss how this would have influenced the development of Elise Blumann's career as an artist.

Elise Blumann commenced her art studies in Berlin in 1916; what were some of the art movements at that time that she would have observed and that may have influenced her?

Recall and discuss the three key types of images (landscape, figure and portrait) – what were the common elements of the paintings produced following Elise Blumann's arrival in Western Australia?

Research and discuss what was considered expressionism and what was described as impressionism in the early period of the 20th century and relate and discuss what you saw in the exhibition to these types of art making.

IMAGE ANALYSIS EXERCISE

Examine the painting *On the Swan, Nedlands*, 1942

Subjective Frame

- What do I see in the artwork?
- What do I feel?
- What does it remind me of?
- What do others (critics/historians) see and feel about this artwork?

Structural Frame

- What materials and techniques have been used?
- Discuss the composition. Where does my eye travel when I look at the work?
- What elements and principles have been used in the organisation of the work?
- What techniques and processes have been used in the construction of the work? How does this contribute to the meaning of the work?

Cultural Frame

- What time period or culture does the artwork belong to?
- What does the work reveal to you about that culture or society?
- What style or movement does the work belong to?
- What social and cultural issues or concerns are raised in the work – class, race, gender, religion or politics?
- What stylistic influences can be observed?

Postmodern Frame

- Have past works been used in a new way?
- Have any images been appropriated and re-contextualised?
- In your opinion, what meaning, values, beliefs or opinions does this work communicate today?
- How do the opinions of others (critics/historians) support or oppose your judgement of the work?

Make notes about the artwork using the frames and guiding questions.



Subjective Frame	
Structural Frame	
Cultural Frame	
Postmodern Frame	

NOTE THAT THIS DOCUMENT FORMAT HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM THE SCSA WEBSITE.