



THE UNIVERSITY OF
**WESTERN
AUSTRALIA**

Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery



Education Kit

Cosmopolitan | 31 August — 7 December 2019



Adelaide Perry, *Woman pilot*, 1931, oil on composition board, 51 x 41cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, McGillivray Bequest Fund, 1983. © Adelaide Perry estate

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Cosmopolitan

Art from the 1930s in the University of Western Australia Art Collection and the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art

Introduction

Cosmopolitan brings together diverse works from the 1930s, held in two collections – the University of Western Australia Art Collection and the Cruthers Collection of Women's Art. While a relatively modest survey in terms of size, the exhibition captures something of the eclectic, and indeed elusive, character of progressive visual culture of the 1930s.

Against the background of the Wall Street Crash of October 1929 which precipitated the Great Depression, and entry into the Second World War in September 1939, as in other parts of the world, there was a rise in left-wing activity in Australia in the 1930s. The widespread poverty and social unrest of the Depression, as well as the rise of totalitarian regimes of the extreme right in Europe, prompted a new political consciousness in many Australians.

Many artists responded using their art as a political statement, an expression of their values. Two very different styles however provided the vehicle for this; for Norwegian-born Harald Vike, working in Perth in the 1930s, it was realism – while Sydney based artist James Gleeson chose Surrealism to address what he described as the 'lurking terror' of impending war (see AGNSW biography). Melbourne based Peter Purves Smith also

employed a Surrealist style to communicate unsettling concerns relating to his observations and opinions of Nazi Germany and the social conditions of modern life.

Artists were also increasingly influenced by expanding technologies such as print and film, while advances in modes of travel made the flow of information more speedy and economical. The ever-increasing interconnectedness made possible by technology also prompted creative responses, such as seen in Frank Hinder's artworks where he expressed dynamism through Cubist methods. Ethel Spowers too employed Cubist strategies to communicate rhythmic motion and energy in her artworks.

The wide dissemination of images and information, both through travel and the distribution of art journals led to experimentation with a range of styles in Australia: namely Realism, Surrealism, and Cubism. Artists' motivations ranged from the promotion of ideological allegiances to an interest solely in aesthetic outcomes.

Reference

James Gleeson biography: <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/artists/gleeson-james/>



Ethel Spowers, *Harvest*, 1932, linocut, 19.3 x 29.1 cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, University Senate Grant, 1982

Ethel Spowers, *Harvest*, 1932

Social, Cultural and Historical Context

Ethel Spowers was born 11 July 1890, in South Yarra, Melbourne and died 5 May 1947, in East Melbourne. She studied art abroad in Paris (1911-1917) and London (1921-24). In 1928 and 1929 she took linocut classes at the Grosvenor School of Modern Art in London where she was a student of Claude Flight, the leading exponent of the modernist linocut. In 1931 she returned to study composition and life drawing at the Grosvenor School with the school principal Iain Macnab. Her printmaking mentor, Claude Flight promoted the linocut as being affordable for the working class. It was seen as an accessible artform that captured the spirit of the age, both in form and in economy; as lino prints could be reproduced with relative ease, enabling the art form to be available at a price for the average man (Grishin, 2013). In addition, the images were readily reproduced in magazines as with *The Home* which was published 1920-1942.

Under Flight's and Macnab's tutelage, Spowers absorbed modernist ideas of composition and rhythmic design. In the 1930's her linocuts attracted critical attention for their modern dynamic, rhythmic sense of movement, free flowing compositions, vibrant and simplified colour palettes and a down to earth domesticity (Grishin, 2013). Most of Spower's linocuts were produced between 1928 and 1935 and were completed in a matte and grainy palette that was dominated by muted greys, greens and browns (Benezit, 2006). Her works often focussed on observation of everyday life, particularly the world of children and some later works express a modernist vision of the industrial landscape (Coppel, 2002).

Visual Analysis

First Impression and Technique: A six colour multi block lino print on paper completed in muted tones. The composition is filled with interlocking shapes and implied movement.

Subject: Spowers has captured a scene of strong, young workers toiling with focussed unison. Working together in a pro-socialistic themed scene of communal labour. The inclusion of a woman in the background places her as equal to her male counterparts; as being strong and useful.

Style: 'Flattened form' has been used to describe the subject in the composition. A desaturated subdued pallet of ochres, blues, grey and red browns are used, these are indicative of the colours widely used during this period.

Form: Spowers uses flattened forms and desaturated colours with a limited palette. Emphasis is placed on the dark trousers of the man in the foreground. Repetition is found in linear patterns made with the hoes, the shapes of the figures and the colours. Large areas of space are defined by single flat areas of colour, with the simplified design creating a distillation of essential form. Spowers has eliminated most of the detail in the scene to preserve only images of simplified bales of harvested wheat and athletic human forms wearing unified styles of clothing. She has generalised the colour of the wheat field into a subdued ochre which is complimented by the chalky blue of the workers' shirts. The rusty reds and grey green tones are beautifully matched in tonal timbre to create a harmonious colour scheme. The placement of the figures in the composition creates a rhythmic sense of movement.

Influences: There are aesthetic qualities reminiscent of Japanese woodblocks with their flattened form, reduction of tonal qualities, simplified compositions and the outlining of shapes with strong line. The influence of Futurism and Vorticism is also present in the dynamic use of shapes and angular forms use to describe the subject.

Mood: The artwork promotes a feeling of rhythmic movement and harmony, and provides a positive snap shot of idealistic values of collaborative effort and working the land.



Peter Purves Smith, *Sketch for New York*, c 1936, watercolour and pencil, 53 x 35.4 cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Dr Albert Gild Fund, 1981

Peter Purves Smith, *Sketch for New York*, c 1936

Social, Cultural and Historical Context

Peter Purves Smith was born in Melbourne, March 26, 1912 and died in Melbourne, July 23, 1949. Purves Smith began his formal art studies under Iain Macnab at London's Grosvenor School of Modern Art in the period 1935–6 while on an extended trip to Europe. Whilst studying abroad he became acutely aware of the growing political unrest and changing political climate pre-World War II. Many of his art works during this time were directly influenced by his observations and opinions of Nazi Germany.

Surrealism was growing in popularity across Europe during this period, and before his return to Australia in 1936, Purves Smith studied work by leading artists of the movement including Salvador Dali, which were shown in two major exhibitions held in London and New York that year. Purves Smith adopted some characteristics of Surrealism as seen in the anthropomorphic exaggeration of forms which allowed him to express both humour and barbarism (Eagle, 2014). Purves Smith painted both cosmopolitan and country life, and although his style sources were founded in contemporary European art, his interpretation of subjects were unmistakably Australian.

Visual Analysis

First impression and Technique: A water colour on paper of simplified rectilinear forms representing the sky scrapers of a modern city, rendered in desaturated tones.

Style: The work appears gestural and the forms have been simplified into basic shapes with the elimination of graphic details.

Form: Purves Smith creates an almost claustrophobic composition with densely set buildings fighting for space in the rectilinear landscape. The gestural use of line indicates the speed at which Purves Smith completed the sketch in preparation for his oil painting titled *New York*, (1936). The foreground is framed with a number of sinuous blacken lifeless trees that appear as burnt remnants after a bush fire. Carefully sketched angles, completed as under drawing, are evident; appearing intermittently through the washes of paint. The pencil draft indicates that Purves Smith drafted correct angles and proportions for the skyscrapers, before applying thin gestural washes of colour. He paints the buildings in strokes, with an almost countable number of visible brush strokes. Thin washes are applied, and the surface of the paper is often visible. His use of colour is subdued and melancholic; with foreboding ghostly trees set at the foot of the looming city. The contrast of the organic form of the trees against the geometric form of the city creates visual interest. The artist appears to exercise restraint in the amount of media he uses, as with scantily applied paint.

Influences: The anthropomorphic forms of the twisted trees are reminiscent of Dali-esque imagery and Surrealism which was embraced by Purves Smith. He was also good friends with the artist Russel Drysdale and similarities in style can be seen in their work. For example, in their stylisation of outback Australia, where times, both artists portray wiry elongated figures inhabiting surreal drought-stricken landscapes with twisting carcasses of trees and suffering livestock.

Mood: Expressive and gestural form representing looming buildings create a sense of foreboding, and a melancholic dystopian view of the city.



Clarice Beckett, *Evening on the Yarra*, c 1930, oil on paperboard, 32.2 x 49.5 cm, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, Gift of Mrs M W Moody in memory of Thomas and Henry Ingram Moody, 1949

Clarice Beckett, *Evening on the Yarra*, c 1930

Social, Cultural and Historical Context

Clarice Beckett was born in Victoria in 1887 and died in Melbourne, Victoria in 1935.

Beckett was little known as an artist when she died at the age of 47. She did not travel or study overseas and lived a somewhat secluded life with her parents until their death. She was a part of the distinctly Australian school of 'Tonalism Modernism' (Freeland, 2019), brought to Australia in 1912 by Max Meldrum. Clarice Beckett studied under Max Meldrum at Queen's College in Ballarat.

"Tonalism is fundamentally different and is best understood as a painting system. It involves no under drawing and is based on the rapid and direct recording of tonal impressions (generalised massed areas of light and dark) onto the canvas in the order the impressions meet the eye of the artist. Its intention is to create an exact illusion of nature. In this way, it is a spontaneous, 'perceptual' and responsive form of painting, as opposed to traditional tonal painting, which is craft-based and measured." (Lock-Weir, 2009)

It wasn't until the late 1990's that as many as 2000 of her works were discovered in a shed on a rural property in Victoria. Clarice Beckett has since begun to receive recognition as one of Australia's finest painters. She painted secluded seascapes and suburban scenes, rarely focusing on human subjects, simplifying forms and enveloping them in atmospheric and somewhat melancholic evening or morning mists (Allam, 2014, Freeland, 2019).

Visual Analysis

First Impression and technique: An oil painting on canvas capturing an urban scene of Melbourne's Yarra River. The composition is open and simple.

Subject: A snap shot view of the river at dusk with a team of rowers and a moored boat harboured by the banks of the Yarra.

Style: The work appears impressionistic.

Form: Beckett has blocked-in tonal transitions and applied a soft-focus to the subject. A cool evening is evoked through the soft green and greys with a muted complimentary palette of predominately orange and blue/greens. Purple undertones of the river's edge balance the composition and recede into the background, providing depth to the scene. The artwork appears luminescent with a gentle vibration of light appearing through the opaque misty atmosphere. The shimmering stillness of the water and purple undertones create an ethereal atmosphere. The composition appears cropped or truncated and softened triangular forms are repeated throughout in the river bank, tree canopy and shapes evident in the boats. Subdued tones and the diffused edge quality create atmosphere. The subject is defined and anchored by the repeated directional sharpened lines of the banks' edge, and boats.

Influences: Impressionism laid the foundation for Tonal Modernism. The truncated composition is reminiscent of a Japanese aesthetic.

Mood: Beckett's work evoked a melancholic, ethereal atmosphere. The calm waters and static image create a meditative reflective mood.

References

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Unit Planner

Studio Area: Printmaking

MAKING

The following outcomes are adapted from the Western Australian Curriculum for Year 10 Visual Arts as specified on the School Curriculum and Standards Authority website.

<https://k10outline.scsa.wa.edu.au/home/teaching/curriculum-browser/the-arts/visual-arts2#year-10-syllabus>

Project Description

Using Ethel Spowers' lino print designs as inspiration, create a multi-colour lino print. The subject will evolve around people involved in sporting activities.

INQUIRY

Explore ideas for your own art-making which supports your learning style and chosen discipline, (e.g. brainstorm, mind map, annotations/sketches, photography, media testing.)

- Observe and record people engaged in sporting activities.
- Consider taking photographs at your local sporting events, collect images from sources such as newspapers, books and/or the internet.

Exploration of a range of 2D visual art techniques, in order to plan and influence your personal choice of materials and technologies.

Visual art language used in the development of an artwork (e.g. distilling form and refining shapes to represent ideas).

Recognition, use of, and responding to visual art conventions (e.g. the comparisons between traditional and modernist art styles; the transition from still to moving imagery).

Exploration, development and refinement of a personal style in conjunction with representations of other artists' styles through documentation and drawings.

Ideas explored and refined, responding to the style of other artists in your own artwork

- Record people in various positions, leaping, stretching, running, pushing or falling.
- Observe Ethel Spowers' use of simplified form, repetition of dynamic shapes and filling the composition.
- Consider visual balance.
- Seek to create a sense of movement through repetition and directional lines.

Application of a range of visual art techniques in order to plan and influence your choice of materials and technologies (media testing/exploration).

- Complete colour studies.
- Explore desaturated colour schemes.
- Develop a colour palette that includes complimentary colours using desaturated tones.
- Reduce the design into 5 or six colours.

ART PRACTICE

Materials, techniques, technologies and processes manipulated to develop and represent your own artistic intentions.

Techniques and processes chosen to refine and resolve your artwork to a more complex level, when representing ideas and subject matter.

- Please note that you can print multiple colours from the same lino block - which is common practice in schools due to budget constraints. However, it is recommended that each colour has its own lino block, ie. for a 5 colour print you will need 5 lino blocks. The following instructions relate to using only one block.
- Trace your final design on to the lino, using a water-resistant permanent marker to ensure that the line work remains intact during the printing and carving processes.
- Indicate the colour of each area with either a letter or word in permanent marker.
- Always print your lightest colour first, if you have white included in your design, carve out all areas that are to be kept white.
- Print the lightest colour.
- Carve out all areas that you would like to keep that first colour.
- Print the second lightest colour.
- Carve out all areas that you would need so as to keep the second lightest colour.
- Repeat the above steps until you have printed all of the colours in sequence from the lightest to dark.
- Your final colour will always be your darkest tone.

Registration of prints

Please see links for ideas on how to register your prints.

<https://threebearsprints.com/blogs/blog/how-to-register-linocut-prints>

<http://introductiontoprintmaking.blogspot.com/p/an-overview-of-registration.html>

Numbering and signing prints

Please see the following links on how to number and sign prints

<http://angusfisherarts.com/labelling-an-original-print>

MATERIALS

Drawing/Design and Lino Printmaking

- Pencils, pens, ruler and eraser
- Paint (gouache/acrylic/water colour)
- Paper - for design development (as well as printmaking)
- Linoleum (or alternative)
- Lino cutting /carving tools
- Printing ink
- Paper for the prints
- Roller
- Burnishing tool

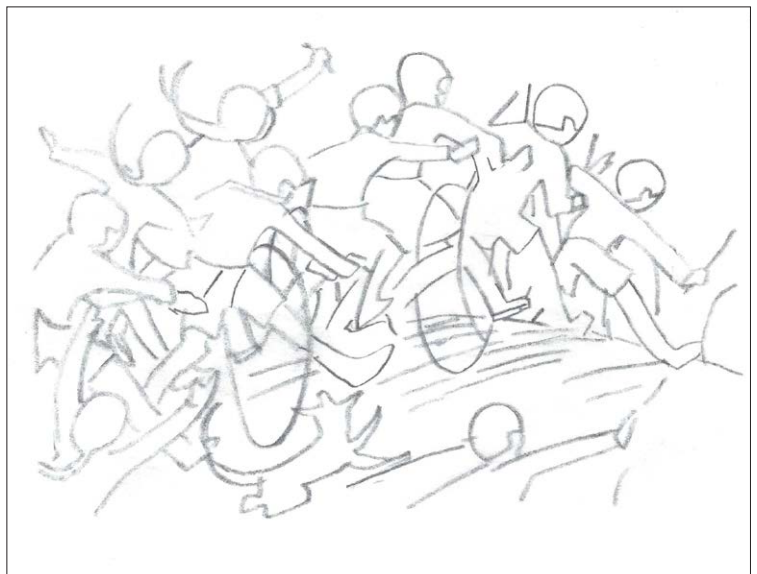
Features of Lino prints by Ethel Spowers

- Composition is densely populated
- Repetition of shapes
- Stylised figures
- Elimination of facial features



Examination of Ethel Spowers, *Football*, 1936

- Overlaying of figures
- Directional lines
- Dynamic use of line
- Implied movement

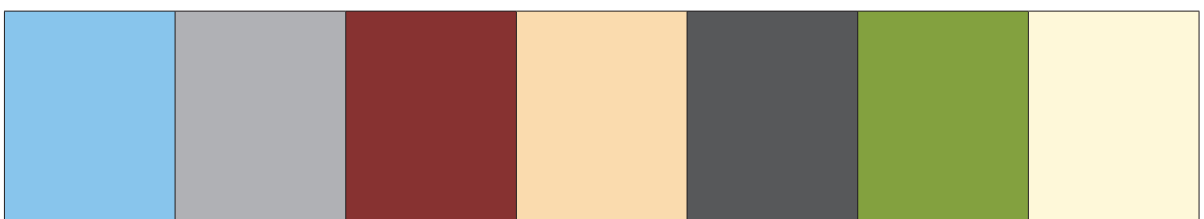
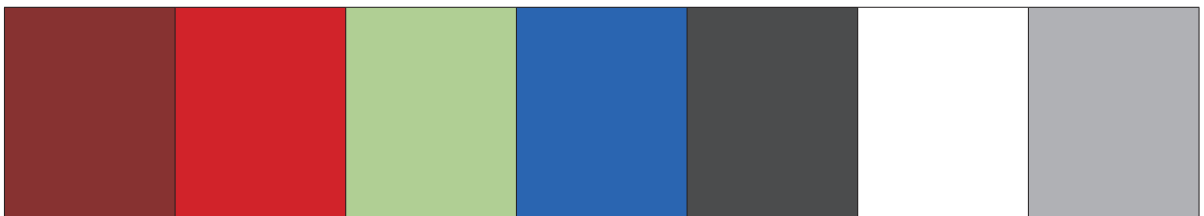
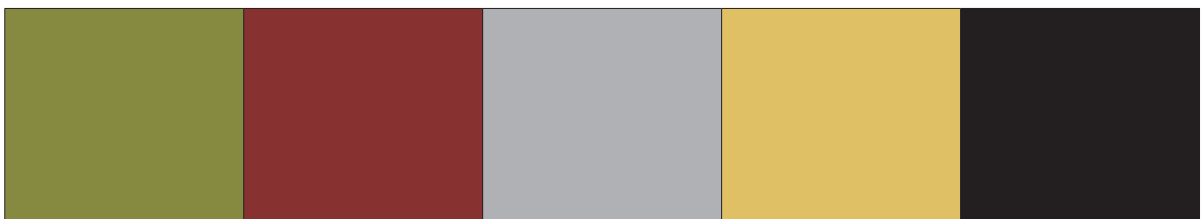
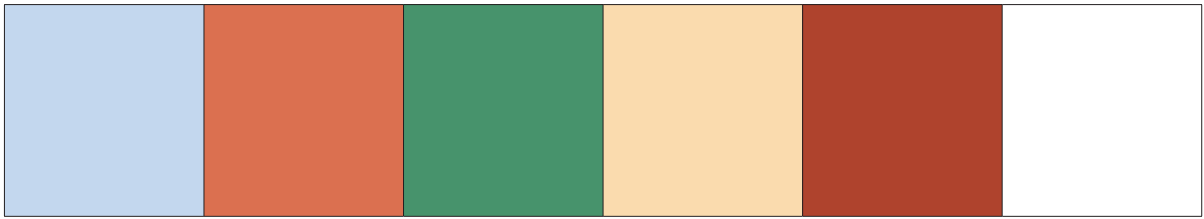


Examination of Ethel Spowers, *Children's Hoops*, 1936

Compositional studies



Colour Palettes inspired by Ethel Spowers' artworks





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Cover image: Ethel Spowers, *Harvest*, 1932, linocut,
19.3 x 29.1 cm, The University of Western Australia Art
Collection, University Senate Grant, 1982



CULTURAL PRECINCT

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Gallery open
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