

Stage 6 Visual Arts

Using *Beyond the frame*

This article sets out some strategies for teaching the content of the new Stage 6 syllabus, using artworks from the new visual arts resource, *Beyond the frame*. Although the kit focuses primarily on combined appreciating and making activities for Years 5 to 8, the reproductions of the artworks provide valuable reference material for Stage 6 study. The works are taken from NSW regional galleries, so that students have the opportunity to engage directly with works.

The following suggestions for learning experiences for art critical investigations are organised under the three areas of syllabus content: frames, conceptual framework and practice. Students can apply the questions to the artworks from the kit, but the general principles will give students ways of engaging with any artworks that they encounter in their course. The practice will offer them strategies for addressing questions in the HSC exam.

In the learning experiences for each area of content, students will implicitly be addressing other areas of

content; in addressing the questions relative to the frames, ideas relating to the conceptual framework and practice will intersect.

The first learning experience foregrounds the cultural and structural frames for selected works from the *Beyond the frame* kit. This does not preclude investigating the same works through other frames. Also the responses that arise from applying a frame can create tensions with responses resulting from employing other frames. Students need to recognise that these apparent inconsistencies can be the basis for enriched debate and essay writing and signify the sorts of disjunctions that occur between artists' intentions and audience interpretations.

Foregrounding the cultural and structural frames

Students investigate pictorial (figure) arrangements in the two artworks below, from *Beyond the frame*, employing the questions related to the cultural and structural frames to engage with the works. Students can also refer to statements in the syllabus, pp. 25 and 26.

Five Girls on Longboards, Ray Leighton, c. 1940, photograph



Dinner at Hill End, Wendy Sharpe, 1997, gouache on paper.

Questions: Structural frame

- How are the figures grouped and how is this understood by audiences?
- What language does the artist use to construct the picture e.g. depth, colour relationships, associations, lighting?
- What symbols of women and men and their sexualities are evident? What ideas do they communicate?

Questions: Cultural frame

- How do images within the work of female and male sexuality reflect cultural attitudes in Australia in the 1940s and 1990s?
- What activities are figures engaged in and what do these reflect about Australian attitudes to leisure? (refer to Leighton) How have attitudes towards board surfing changed since the 1940s?

Foregrounding the subjective and postmodern frames

In this learning experience, students apply the subjective and postmodern frames to the artworks, *Big Shark in a Small Ute* by Susan Fischer, and *Inherited Absolute* by Imants Tillers. Students need to remember that the intention of offering different viewpoints is to arrive at different and sometimes conflicting ideas about artworks, and that it is this simultaneity that enhances their understandings about artworks. These questions will undoubtedly also provide information in relation to other frames: about cultural values and the signs and symbols represented by those cultures.

Big Shark in a Small Ute and *Inherited Absolute* (Subjective frame)

- What feelings or moods are expressed in the artworks and how is the form or medium in each manipulated to achieve this?
- For each work, list objects and images which have associations outside the context of the work and identify these associations.
- Refer to the artist's use of imagination in creating a dreamlike, fantasy or lyrical quality.
 - (a) What significance do cars and fishing have in Australian lifestyle, and

- (b) What significance do nativity scenes have in Christian religious beliefs?

Big Shark in a Small Ute (Postmodern frame)

- How does the artist go about creating paradoxes or ambiguities in the work? Is she successful? Why?
- How does this work revisit ideas about conventional representation of sculpture?

Inherited Absolute (Postmodern frame)

- The right-hand part of the work appropriates a painting by de Chirico. The left section consists of drawings made by the artist's young daughter. How does the juxtaposition of these question the validity or status of drawing and painting as traditional art forms? What other image in the right-hand section challenges these traditions?
- What theme or subject matter links the two sections? How does surface treatment provide for seamless transition?
- Identify different art historical periods or styles that are referred to in this eclectic work.
- Suggest words to describe the practice of taking ideas and images of artworks from historic or exotic styles and placing them in contemporary works.

Discussing artworks using the conceptual framework

In this series of learning activities, the conceptual framework is used to investigate *Word Midden*, by Liz Jeneid, from *Beyond the frame*.

In the Preliminary course, students focus their studies on the agencies of the artwork: artist, artwork, world and audience. In the HSC course, the focus of study should include the relationships between those agencies. The following questions for students are organised under these relationships. They provide them with understandings about particular works and a way to interrogate works. It also helps them to consider the different ways questions may be asked of them in the exam. Students could be asked questions about works representing other forms to give them insight into the different ways that artworks exist as physical objects: their existence in time and place as sensed and understood by audiences. The frames could also be used to assist enquiries.

Word Midden, Liz Jeneid:

(Audience/world)

- What common objects do you encounter in the work? Do you think that audiences would expect artworks to contain these banal objects? Of what places or contexts are you reminded?
- How would the audience be confronted? Why would they be surprised by this work?

(Artwork/audience)

- What qualities of the work demand close inspection? Describe the tactile qualities of the work and account for the use of repetition in the work.
- What associations or memories do you have in relation to the work and its ideas, concepts and materials?

(Artist/world)

- What practices in relation to installation art are exhibited and what do they mean?
- Find out how this work relates to other works by the same artist.

(Artist/artwork)

- Research Jeneid's practice and decide what the artist's intentions are in relation to:
 - (a) ideas represented
 - (b) selection of materials and constructional techniques.

(Artist/audience)

- What ideas and feelings are being expressed in the work? Do these coincide with meanings perceived by the audience? How can you check? What is the value of variant audience responses?

(Artwork/world)

- How does the gallery context contribute meaning to the work? Is meaning dependent on context?

Foregrounding practice in relation to selected works by Arthur Boyd

For this learning experience, find three artworks by Arthur Boyd that represent the Shoalhaven landscape from different decades. Include, from *Beyond the frame*, the artwork *Pulpit Rock, Blackbird and Cow*, painted in 1990. Also prepare for students a biographical summary

of Boyd's life and work, including significant events and developments in his practice. Ask students to use the examples of artworks, their citations and the biography as source material to write an appraisal of Boyd's practice. You could use this guideline for students to organise their response to the Boyd task:

Conventions of practice:

- What do the sources reveal about the conventions of:
 - (a) oil painting in Australia in the 20th century?
 - (b) representation of the Australian landscape? (Refer to Impressionism/Expressionism.)
- What do the sources suggest about processes, influences and changes over time, choices and innovations of the artist?

Conceptual practice:

- What ideas or feelings is Boyd expressing about the Shoalhaven area?
- What do you know about his preference for this subject and his predilection for painting it?

Material practice:

- What kinds of strategies does he use to create particular effects (light, colour, texture, perspective, imagery)? How are these sustained or changed over time? How does Boyd's use of oil paint and composition change over time? (Refer to titles and sizes of works.)

Further activities:

Research other works by Boyd that represent different subject matter and forms. Comment about the bias of the textual and pictorial source material that you have been given.

- What information about his practice is not included?
- Does the biographical information provide interpretations and insights into the meanings of the works or does it primarily offer data? In other words, to what extent is the biography an example of art historical writing or art critical writing?

The kit, *Beyond the frame*, provides stimulating examples of artworks that are accessible to students and can make a link between their appreciation of art and their own artmaking.

Janet Rentz
Visual arts consultant
Curriculum Support Directorate