

GENERAL COMMENTS RELATED TO THE COLLECTION

There are a number of ways that Asian art can be studied.

It is easy to think when you look through the rows of art books in most libraries that Western art holds the central place in the development of artistic thinking. Yet Asian–Pacific art has a long and interesting history and has been highly influential in the way European art has developed. Contemporary Asian art reflects a long history of Asian art practice, as well as being influenced by European art histories and movements.

The works in this website are part of the Asia–Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art 2002 (APT 2002) <<http://www.qag.qld.gov.au/apt2002>>, presented by the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane <<http://www.qag.qld.gov.au>>.

A number of the works feature photography and the moving image. The focus of the exhibition is on new media and its impact on modern visual culture. Many of the works use performance as a form of cultural and artistic expression. Although the collection is all from the Asia–Pacific area, the works are an excellent starting point for exploring issues of globalisation and identity.

You can look at these artworks from a personal interpretation or subjective frame by thinking about what an artwork means to you. You may relate to the work because it touches issues that concern you or because certain aspects of the work connect with things in your life or experiences you or people you know may have had.

Artworks can also be explored in terms of cultural or biographical interpretation. You might look at the background and culture of the artist and the ways that this has impacted on the subject matter and techniques of communication that the artist uses. Frequently in Asian–Pacific art, a detailed understanding of the symbolic and cultural messages within the work helps you to gain a more complete understanding of the work. With all art it is important to think about what has influenced the artist. This can include religious beliefs, past history and present-day issues.

It is also useful when studying artworks to look at what the same artist has done in the past. As some of the artworks in this collection represent a body of the artist's work over a period of time, it is possible to analyse changes that have occurred in the artist's work over this time. This can provide a meaningful way to track the artist's inspiration and the various ways they have developed their ideas through different materials, techniques and subject matter.

It is also possible to study the works from a structural stance. In this way you may explore formal properties of the work such as colour, shape, illumination, movement and other physical aspects of the work. It is useful to investigate this idea in contemporary Asian art by connecting the things you can see with both traditional Asian art trends and also art movements from European traditions. Many of the artworks in this collection include video, graphic and four-dimensional time-related aspects. When looking at these works, you need to think beyond colour, shape, tone and so on.

Many contemporary Asian artworks can also be explored from a postmodern frame where you look at the way the work challenges traditional definitions of art and makes use of aspects such as *juxtaposition* (putting things together in a quirky or challenging way), *metaphor* (using images for both a literal and symbolic meaning) and *appropriation* (the challenging of ideas of what is original by reusing ideas or



objects in new contexts). Postmodernist Asian art may also seek to make a connection between traditional Eastern and Western cultures and to explore the influence of the media and technology. Other works may challenge ideas of materiality in artworks and emphasise conceptual aspects.

While these ideas provide suggestions for ways you can respond to art, you can also use the works in this collection to inform your art-making. You may wish to explore the techniques and materials used. The collection represents a large diversity of possible methods.

Another interesting aspect of the collection from a 'making' perspective is the way many of the artists featured have explored their ideas across a range of art forms. Consider this in terms of your own art-making and the way you can use different forms to build a unified collection of works that pursue certain ideas or themes.

It is also useful to reflect on the way these artists have used personal stories and their life experiences as the basis for their works. Consider the way your life and ideas can be more strongly communicated through your art-making.

LEARNING TO LOOK

You will often hear people saying in relation to art 'I know what I like'. This saying is often used when people look at work that is new and challenging. People may be familiar with impressionist painting and are likely to recognise a vase of flowers or a landscape in a painting. The comment 'I know what I like' is often actually saying 'I like what I know'. In other words, if art seems familiar, people are more likely to like it, as it is comfortable and well-known.

Activity

What does it actually mean to look at an artwork? Talk about the sorts of perception you bring to an artwork. Think about the way such things as experience, knowledge and beliefs might change the way you look at an artwork.

Choose one of the artworks in this site. Quickly write down your first impressions, without reading any of the notes or doing the activities. Then read the notes about the work and try a few of the activities. How has this knowledge changed your perceptions of the work?

Try relating one of the artworks in the collection to a very personal thing that has happened in your life. Tell a friend about the connection between the artwork and something about yourself. How has making this personal connection and relating the work to your experiences changed your perception of the work? How has this process helped you to more fully understand and communicate something about yourself? Think about ways you could use this personal connection to develop an artwork of your own.

Knowing about an artwork assists you to connect your experiences to the artwork and think about the place of the artwork in the world.

CHOOSING ARTWORKS

The Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art is held every three years at the Queensland Art Gallery. The eight works selected for this website are only part of a bigger collection.

Activity

It is the job of the curators to put together interesting collections of works. Visit the US Department of Labor's website <<http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos065.htm>> for more information about the responsibilities of curators.

When you have had a chance to look at the eight works presented in this site, imagine you have to curate an exhibition where only four of the artists can be represented. Which four would you choose and why?

Try to find other artworks by the four artists you have selected and create a virtual exhibition, complete with short 'wall text' (the brief card of information which describes an artwork in a gallery exhibition) to go with each work.

Remember, it is important to reference the source of both images and any text you use.

GETTING INTO THE ARTWORKS

Looking at artwork and understanding art should be fun and use all your senses.

Activity

Choose one of the artworks in the collection. After you have studied it in groups, present the artwork to other people in your class by using creative and sensory ideas. For example, present food reflecting the culture or ideas in the artwork; display the theme or subject of the artwork as a poem or drama piece; gather music to accompany the artwork and present the piece as a dance of movement piece; gather fragrances that capture the essence of the work ... remember to be creative and innovative.

WHAT IS ASIAN-PACIFIC ART?

What indicators or characteristics serve to identify an artwork as coming from the Asia-Pacific region?

Activity

Choose one of the artworks from the collection.

Search the web for three *traditional* artworks from the same country or cultural group (try <<http://www.asianart.org/highlights.htm>> and other sites).

Search for three *contemporary* artworks from the same country or cultural group (try <<http://www.centrea.org/>> and <http://www.zeroland.co.nz/contemporary_artists.html>).

What characteristics, if any, serve to identify the works of a particular country? Use these characteristics as a basis for developing your own artwork in response to the artworks you have found. Remember you can change forms – for example, characteristic colours from a painting can become an interesting starting point for a computer animation or video piece, or a hand gesture in a traditional sculpture may become the inspiration for a series of prints.

Activity

Identify Asian-Pacific artists working in Australia and, where possible, in your local community (try <<http://www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au/arts/>> or <<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/joinus/visasia/>>).

Document their work and note the manner in which their work is supported either within Australia or internationally.



SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS

The artworks in the Asia–Pacific Triennial often reflect the major spiritual traditions in Asia, Pacific and Australia. These traditions can originate from Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoist beliefs, Christianity, the Dreaming and a range of other sources.

Activity

Create a web trail (a series of interconnected websites with activities to direct explorations) that provides an interesting and informative insight into the spiritual influences identified in one of the artworks.

REFLECTIONS

Understanding the past and present culture and context surrounding a piece of art can promote a more detailed interpretation of the artwork. Similarly, investigating an artwork can provide a wonderful insight into culture.

Activity

When you have studied many or all of the APT works presented in this web site, discuss and record in your visual arts process diary (VAPD) or art journal the concepts about Asian art that you have developed.

Think about the way the works have challenged some of the ideas and stereotypes you may have held prior to studying these artworks. How do the artworks also provide insight into significant contemporary issues, particularly things that may concern you at the moment?

Activity

Choose one of the artists and explore the ‘Western’ influences on their work. Then research, either in writing or through your art-making, the contributions made by the Asian art world to the Western art world.

Locate particular artists that have been influenced by Asian visual imagery, culture and/or spiritual beliefs.

Activity

Hold a class debate on the implications of a more inclusive approach to studying Asian art. How important do you think it is that Australian students study Asian art?

Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper supporting the case for APT and its place in the Australian art world.

Activity

As a class, discuss the question ‘Why is it that more art from Asian artists living in Asia is exhibited in Australia than of Asian artists living in Australia?’ Why do you think this is so?

Activity

What are some issues that could emerge when contemporary Australian art meets contemporary arts of the Asian–Pacific area? Should Australia look more to this area and less to Europe for its links?

