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SYLLABUS CONNECTIONS: 2010 ARCHIBALD PRIZE

Framing the Archibald:

K–6 and 7–12 discussion questions and activities

- Mood and drama
- Humour
- Pattern and rhythm
- On the move
- Surface quality

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K–6: Visual Arts and links with key learning areas

Years 7–12: The frames

- Sam Leach *Tim Minchin*

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issues for discussion

K–6: Visual Arts and links with key learning areas

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- Giles Alexander *The alternative ambassadors*
- McLean Edwards *Tim Storrier*
- Jasper Knight *Bill Wright AM*
- Robert Malherbe *The squire – portrait of Luke Sciberras*

Archibald Prize 2010: finalists

Note: Unless otherwise cited, background information and artists quotes are taken from the Archibald Prize exhibition wall texts, AGNSW 2010

MOOD AND DRAMA



17. Alexander McKenzie *Andrew Upton*

oil on linen

McKenzie set out to paint Upton in a more formal way, in the theatre or writing, but says he 'couldn't get away from the image of him in a boat. Andrew had told me about his childhood rowing boats on Pittwater and, in the end, I knew this was how I should paint him.'

Upton is an Australian playwright, screenwriter and actor. How has this painting been given a theatrical appearance? Imagine this is a scene in one of his plays. Where is he going and why is he going there?

Examine the sources of light in the painting. How many can you find? Imagine that the artist had left the lantern unlit. How would this have an impact on the portrait?

Identify the symbols used by McKenzie in this portrait that describe aspects of Upton. Discuss the importance of symbols in this narrative painting.

What historical artworks have similar composition or technical style to this portrait?



19. Nigel Milsom *Adam Cullen (bird as prophet)*

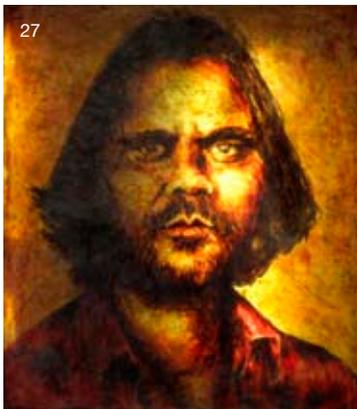
oil on linen

'I aim to depict Adam's vulnerability, stripped of his public persona – quite literally in the way I've handled his features: a nod to Picasso and his cubist style of painting. The bird he is holding is non-specific. A raven? A falcon? It's more a visual metaphor for Adam's mortality. He is trying to stare death in the face with self-confidence yet the look on his face has a sense of clownish dread, knowing that death is final.'

Look at the bird that is perched on Cullen's hand. How does it make you feel? Why do you think the artist has chosen this animal? Research the use of birds as a symbol in art, drama and literature.

Describe the use of line and assess the significance of the low tonal key in this portrait. How do symbols enhance the mood of the painting? Justify your point of view to the class.

Imagine the viewer could lift the mask off Cullen's face. What type of person do you think he'd be like?



27. Craig Ruddy *The prince of darkness - Warwick Thornton*

acrylic, ink pen, charcoal and pigments in resin on fibreglass with lights

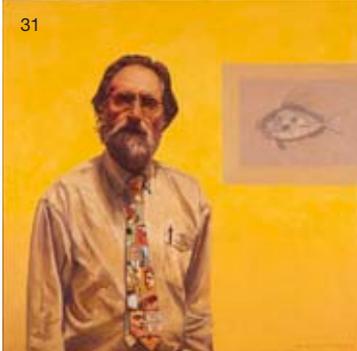
Note: this work is not touring due to maximum weight restrictions

Ruddy was inspired and motivated by Thornton's raw, honest filmmaking after seeing *Samson & Delilah*. 'Warwick's strong social consciousness drives him to fearlessly tackle society's darkest issues head on,' he says. 'In a dignified and sensitive manner he carries us deep into the belly of darkness yet holds up a lantern that leads us through to the light. His film gives a voice to a lost generation who find themselves at the end of a long dark tunnel.'

Read the title of the work. Why do you think the artist has chosen to light this image from behind? What effect does Ruddy's choice of colour have on this portrait?

Examine the use of fibreglass as the surface for the portrait. Why do you think the artist has chosen this medium? Compare this approach to traditional painting techniques.

Thornton is an Australian film director. What types of films do you think he would create? How has Ruddy supported his depiction of this film director through the materials he has used?



31. Greg Somers *Self-portrait with the picture of Dory in grey*

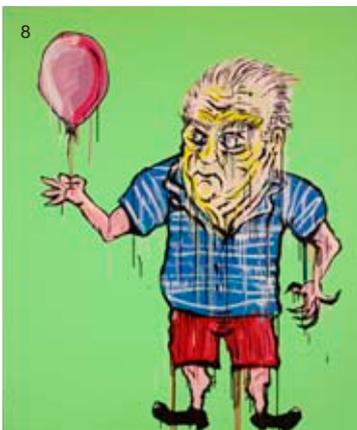
water-mixable oil on canvas

Somers' self-portrait is a celebration of his contentment at being the age he is – an increasingly, but happily, grizzled 60-year-old. It also acknowledges the influence of the great artists. With a title that reveals his love for plays on words, the picture of the Dory represents accepting what you are rather than yearning after eternal youth as in Oscar Wilde's classic novel

The picture of Dorian Gray.

Examine the use of the colour yellow in the background. How does it make you feel? How would your feelings change if the artist used a cool colour?

Look at Somers' tie. Can you see any images you recognise? Why do you think he has chosen to paint himself in this way?



What are the visual codes the artist uses in this portrait to lighten the mood of this otherwise serious image? How does the title of the work support this? Discuss the use of irony and appropriation in this work.

8. Adam Cullen *Gareth at the country fair*

acrylic and enamel on canvas

'Gareth has always been an influence,' says Cullen. 'He was always ahead of his time with his expressionistic yet pop-styled artwork. His work is 'out there': sometimes trans-sexual, often trans-medium, always on the periphery. I had a dream about Gareth and we were at a country fair. Gareth is crusty but a big kid with a great sense of play. He delicately grips his helium balloon playfully testing its buoyancy.'

Observe the way Cullen has painted this portrait. Respond to the way he has applied the paint. How could this be perceived as bringing humour into a traditional portrait exhibition such as the Archibald Prize?



What features or symbols does Cullen use to make this portrait appear humorous? Consider the title and discuss how this adds to the effect. What else could he be holding in his hand?

Investigate who Gareth is. What characteristics has the artist chosen to exaggerate? Do you think Cullen has captured the sitter's personality?

26. Victor Rubin *John Olsen – a diptych part I seated, part II in his bath*

acrylic on linen

Rubin experimented with several different versions for the bath painting before arriving at this composition. Various poses for the seated portrait were tested. 'It's a mixture of Rembrandt and Van Gogh but painted in the French tradition, which John and I are so attached to. He loves Matisse but also Soutine – it's the romantic and classical,' says Rubin. 'There is also a cubist element to the work with an emphasis on the monumentality of form that reflects his stature.'

Compare the two representations of Olsen. Discuss how they are different. Do you think one is serious and one silly? Explore the idea of public and private portraits.

In class debate whether Rubin has created a caricature of Olsen. Identify the elements in the paintings that support your response.

Research the work of Olsen. Compare and contrast the painting styles of Olsen and Rubin. Do you think it would be a challenge for an artist to paint another artist? Give reasons for your answer. Select an artist you would like to paint for the Archibald Prize.

PATTERN AND RHYTHM



34. Apple Yin *The previous life*

oil on canvas

Terry English is a landscape artist and director of Hornsby Arts Council in NSW. When Apple Yin met him a few years ago, she immediately envisaged him on the Silk Road in the western mountains of China, 1000 years ago. 'One man walking along the Silk Road, shoulders slumped, dust spiralling in his wake. His head was covered with a headdress. His eyes had experienced many vicissitudes of life and were filled with pain and kindness. This was my immediate impression of him,' says Yin.

Look at the colours Yin has used to create the surface of English's skin. What effect does that create? Imagine the age of the subject. Compare the tonal qualities of your own skin with that of the figure in the painting.

Look carefully at the background. How has the paint been applied to the surface?

What is the significance of the calligraphy in the background? How does it support the portrayal of this character or the cultural background of the artist?



3. Kate Beynon *Self-portrait with guardian spirits*

oil on canvas

Beynon's self-portrait is a contemplation of the journey she has taken from her birthplace in Kowloon – also known as the City of Nine Dragons – to her life in Australia. 'Thirty-six years later, I embrace a hybrid identity and trans-cultural life as a Chinese-Malaysian/Welsh and Australian artist,' she says. Blending traditional and contemporary imagery, Beynon's work has long been influenced by the Chinese paintings of her late maternal grandfather, animation, film, textiles, fashion and comic book-style graphics.

How many different types of line can you see? Describe the types of patterns they create. Discuss the effects.

This is a self-portrait of the artist. Describe how she is sitting. Copy her pose. How do you feel? Consider why she has chosen to pose in this way.

What is a guardian spirit? What does the dragon symbolise? Find out in which cultures the dragon plays an important role.

Does this portrait remind you of any other forms of popular culture? Where could you expect to see an image like this in today's society?



9. Marc de Jong *Janice Petersen*

oil on linen

De Jong has worked pixelation with oils for many years, inspired by the way patterns reveal so many different themes and references; from contemporary cultural fragmentation to quantum physics. 'It's been used by Aboriginal artists, post-impressionists, pop and post-modern artists,' he says. 'The media is a relatively new phenomenon in the history of humanity. Television hasn't been around too long, and is probably on its way out, so to synch an old artform up to a recent, omnipresent one by focusing on our nightly news as a theatre of information...'

Look closely at the surface of the painting. How many different coloured dots can you see? How do you think this work was created?

Where is this painting set? What do you think Petersen does for a job?

What relevance does the painting style of this portrait have to the subject Petersen?

Observe this painting up close and from some distance. Note the references to computer graphics, commercial posters and newsprint illustrations. Explore how this painting illustrates the influences of the contemporary world and new technologies on the artist's practice.

ON THE MOVE



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14. Peter Kendall *Underdog*

oil on linen

Kendall wanted to portray boxer Danny Green – The Green Machine to his fans – in peak physical condition. He envisaged a portrait that captured his energy and strength and fierce training regime. However, at initial meetings in Perth, Kendall thought Green looked soft – not the gladiator-like warrior he had planned to paint – so Green arranged for them to meet in Sydney during his build up to the fight. They caught up at the Raging Bull gym in Marrickville where Green’s trainer, Angelo Hyder, was putting him through his final workout after months of preparation.



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Describe the expression on the subject’s face. Mimic Green’s pose. Discuss how it feels to hold this pose.

Imagine this was part of a comic strip and you had to draw the next two frames. What happens next?

How does this painting relate to moving images? Discuss how Kendall has achieved this. What traditional elements give this painting a sense of movement?

How has the artist created a sense of drama in this painting? Observe how Kendall has depicted the light reflecting off the skin. Notice how the strokes have been applied. How does this add to the overall effect?



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28. Paul Ryan *Danie Mellor, true blue country*

oil on canvas

Mellor is a contemporary Indigenous artist. Winner of the 2009 Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award, he currently lectures at Sydney College of the Arts... ‘I love his work,’ says Ryan. ‘It makes such interesting comment on the complex relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures...’ The title of the portrait is both an ironic reference to the famous John Williams song and an acknowledgment of the importance of the colour blue in Mellor’s work.

Describe the environment in the background. Where do you think Mellor is going? Put your hands in your pockets and mimic Mellor’s walk. Do you think he is walking quickly or slowly, with purpose or without purpose? Discuss.

Observe the thickness of the paint on the canvas. Describe how the artist has applied paint to the figure and the background. Imagine the types of tools he used to create the various surface qualities.

What impact does the unpainted edge of this canvas have on the artwork? What other elements make this an unconventional portrait for the Archibald Prize? Compare this portrait to others in the Archibald Prize and discuss how it is different.

30. Ian Smith *Keith Looby al fresco*

oil and acrylic on canvas

This painting alludes to artist Keith Looby’s strong Italian connection, according to Smith. ‘He left Australia as a teenager in the 1960s to go on a world tour and ended up living in Turin and Rome for several years. I remember those first great paintings that he sent back from Italy to be exhibited in Australia.’ Looby returned to Italy to live in the late 1980s. ‘I wanted to paint him like a grand old peeling fresco of his former grandeur,’ says Smith. ‘That’s not bad: millions flock to Italy every year to see the peeling frescoes. New art always looks a bit plastic compared to those lived-in works.’

What is your initial response to this artwork? What features dominate the work? How does the work gain the audience’s attention?

What is awkward about Looby’s pose? Do you think he is moving forward or upward?

Read the exhibition wall text about this portrait. Do you think Smith is successful in suggesting the influence of Italian art and culture? Discuss why colour plays a vital role in creating this effect.

SURFACE QUALITY



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25. Rodney Pople *Stelarc triptych*

oil and photographic media on linen

For over 30 years, Pople has watched Stelarc use his body for art in the same way that a painter uses a canvas. He first met the artist in 1977 in Munich, witnessing one of Stelarc's full body suspensions. At the time, as now, Pople was struck by the artist's self-control and ability to keep focused, rising above pain. In painting this portrait, the artist has invoked the use of the latest technologies in a deliberate attempt to echo Stelarc's own methods of art-making.

Look at the three sections of the portrait, paying close attention to the surface of the painting. How do you think the artist has created this image?



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Find evidence of Pople's use of sandpaper in the painting. What does sandpaper do to a wooden surface? What has this treatment done to the surface of the painting?

Explain the symbolism used by Pople to portray Stelarc in the triptych. What do you think the symbolism represents? Read the exhibition wall text and reflect on your responses.



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4. Shane Bowden and Dean Reilly *I wake up with Today!*

mixed media on canvas

Shane Bowden and Dean Reilly had two sittings with Steve Jacobs, weather presenter on Channel Nine's Today: the first to discover Jacob's true personality, discuss concepts and ideas, and sketch his facial characteristics. At the second they finalised the idea of doing the painting as a diptych that captured two sides of his personality.

What do you think Bowden and Reilly have used to create a glossy finish? Inspect the different layers of paint: the coloured, the white, the black and the finish. In what order do you think the artists have applied the paint?

Jacobs' career places him in the public domain. Why do you think the artists have chosen to portray him with no face at all?

Look at the slight variations of the profiles in this image. Why are they different? Suggest the facial expression the sitter might be showing in each.

13. Cherry Hood *Michael Zavros*

watercolour with oil varnish on canvas

'We had quite a lot in common,' says Hood. 'We were both realist painters back when realism was re-emerging as a new form. Mad about horses and animals in general...' 'I love Michael's paintings and have acquired several. Michael and Alison (his wife) have two of my large works, one of which Michael incorporated into a painting of an interior from a series entitled *Trophy hunter*.' In these works he makes analogies with art collectors' 'hunting trophies' and his own collection of taxidermy, to which the striking springbok depicted here belongs.

Describe the surface of Hood's painting of Zavros. What types of paint has she used? How has she applied them to the surface of the canvas?

Discuss the significance of the gaze in this painting. How has Hood emphasised the face of the sitter?

Why has the artist chosen to eliminate a background and include a personal item, the springbok? How does this affect the overall feeling of the work?

**Archibald Prize 2010
Winner**



16. Sam Leach
Tim Minchin

oil and resin on wood

Analysing the winner

Years K–6

Visual Arts and links with key learning areas



SAM LEACH
Tim Minchin (detail)
oil and resin on wood

Singer/songwriter Tim Minchin is building an international reputation with his off-kilter brand of musical comedy. With his artfully unkempt hair, heavy eye make-up and bare feet, his act is an entertaining mix of piano playing, cheerfully offensive songs, physical comedy and stand-up.

His witty lyrics poke fun at all manner of sacred cows including religion, death, censorship and romantic love. He won the prestigious Perrier Newcomer Award at the 2005 Edinburgh Festival Fringe with his first solo show, *Dark side*, and is now co-writing a musical based on Roald Dahl's novel *Matilda* for the Royal Shakespeare Company to premiere in late 2010.

Sam Leach says he approached Minchin 'primarily because I really like his style of comedy. The topics he deals with – social commentary, the appeal to reason over religion and that kind of thing – tie in with my work. But in a funny way I also see my career reflected in his. His career is much bigger than mine but we became successful in our fields almost simultaneously and our first and second children were also born about the same time.'

Leach met Minchin in London last year when he was exhibiting work in a group show at Bedfordbury Gallery, Covent Garden. They talked about a portrait and Minchin suggested Leach portray him crucified on a neon perspex cross. 'But I don't know if that's my style,' says Leach.

They had a day together at Minchin's London home where Leach did sketches then caught up again in Melbourne during Minchin's current tour, *Ready for this*.

'I wanted a full-length portrait because he does use his whole body when he performs. It's him in his house so there are a few personal pointers, like the baby's lamb skin.'

Born in Adelaide in 1973 and based in Melbourne, Leach has a Bachelor of Arts, Honours (Painting) and a Master of Art (Fine Arts) from RMIT University. He won the Metro5 Art Award and the Fletcher Jones Prize in 2006 and the Eutick Memorial Still Life Award in 2007. He has had ten solo shows in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide and has been represented in various group shows. This is his fourth consecutive year in the Archibald Prize.

Years K–6

LOOKING AND INTERPRETING

Visual Arts: The artist has chosen a full-length portrait of Minchin. **Observe** the expression on Minchin's face. **Describe** his body language. **Copy** this pose and consider how you feel. **Explore** the symbolism of the subject being barefoot. **Create** a full-length portrait of a friend focusing on body language and stance.

Visual Arts: **Survey** the environment Minchin is depicted in. Are there any clues provided as to the sitter's profession or interests? **List** the elements of this portrait that make it unique. How do these elements inform us about the sitter's world?

Links to KLAs

English: **Imagine** meeting and interviewing Minchin about the experience of being the subject for an Archibald Prize portrait. What would he be like? **Write** a script of the interview. **Roleplay** the interview in class.

HSIE: **Research** who Minchin is and compare your initial response to the information you found. **Explore** the different types of humour in Australian society. **Discuss** how humour can vary in various cultures.

Science: Leach sights 17th-century Dutch artists as an influence on this practice. **Research** the pigments and oils used in 17th-century Dutch painting. Do you think Leach has prepared his oil paints? **Discuss** the impact technology has had on painting.

Analysing the winner

Years 7–12

Visual Arts



SAM LEACH
Tim Minchen (detail)
oil and resin on wood

Years 7–12

THE FRAMES

Subjective

What is your initial response to the portrait of Minchin? Describe the mood of this portrait and how the artist has portrayed the subject.

How do you think Minchin may have responded to the news that his portrait won the Archibald Prize?

Given the satirical nature of Minchin's writings and performances, how has the artist conveyed this in the portrait? What do you think is the significance of the props and background that Leach has included in this painting?

Cultural

Discuss how Leach references his influence of 17th-century Dutch painting.

Examine the impact of historical styles on contemporary artists.

Structural

Leach coats his work with a clear resin. How does this technical approach draw the viewer into the work as well as separating them from the subject? How might the reflective quality of the resin affect the viewer?

Consider Leach's body of work. Compare the compositions and styles with this portrait. Identify recurring elements. How representative is the Minchin portrait of Leach's practice?

This is the smallest painting to win the Archibald Prize. Compare its scale to that of other finalists in the exhibition. Does the scale of this portrait affect your engagement with the subject? Do you think this portrait winning will have an impact on the finalists for 2011?

Post-modern

How does this image challenge the traditional genre of portraiture? Discuss how the winning entries in the Archibald Prize over the years have reflected changes in artists' tastes. Evaluate issues that have influenced the 2010 Archibald Prize. Discuss the reasons for the continued interest in the Archibald Prize.

Focus works



1. Giles Alexander *The alternative ambassadors* (Professors Ross Garnaut and Martin Green)

oil, resin, spray enamel and green-back on linen

1. Giles Alexander

The alternative ambassadors

(Professors Ross Garnaut and Martin Green)

oil, resin, spray enamel and green-back on linen

Professor Ross Garnaut is best known for his influential climate change report commissioned by the Australian Government. Professor Martin Green is a world leader in photovoltaic research, turning the sun's energy into electricity.

Giles Alexander's double portrait of them – his most ambitious work to date – references Holbein's 16th-century masterpiece *The ambassadors* held by London's National Gallery.

'Holbein's painting is an almost life-size allegorical portrait of two men from Henry Tudor's court,' says Alexander. 'I've re-contextualised the various allegorical props in Holbein's painting to address the climate change debate with which my sitters are synonymous. The title hints at both the original painting and the alternative energies being displayed in the place of the proto-scientific instruments of Holbein's work.'

Alexander's wife has a PhD in photovoltaics and lectures in sustainable energy at the University of NSW, which is how he met Green. He feels the high profile of the Archibald Prize would be well used documenting the important issue of climate change and the role of alternative energies.

Alexander aspires to early northern European oil painting techniques, but contrasts this with a contemporary plasticity that speaks of consumer culture. The high-gloss resin, applied atop months of painstaking work, acts as filter between the real and hyperreal. 'It seduces and implicates the spectator, who is reflected in the work.'

Born in London in 1975, Alexander immigrated to Australia in 2000. He studied at the National Art School where he won the Murray Sime Prize for painting. He also won the inaugural MCQ International Art Prize at Sydney's MCA, the Metro 5 prize in Melbourne in 2007 and was selected for the inaugural Contemporary and Modern Australian Art exhibition in London in 2009. He has his second solo show in Melbourne later this year and will exhibit at the Hong Kong Art Fair.

K-6 Looking and interpreting

Visual Arts: Alexander's artwork contains a number of symbols referencing science and the environment. **List** all the things you can see. In pairs, choose three different symbols in the artwork and discuss why you think Alexander has included them.

Visual Arts: Portrait artists often include objects that inform the viewer about the sitter. What do the objects and clothing in the portrait tell us about Garnaut and Green?

Visual Arts: In the past, public portraits tended to be large and private portraits tended to be small. How does the size of this painting impact on you? **Find** a small portrait in the exhibition and compare the two.

Links to KLAs

Science and Technology: Alexander has included two environmentally friendly power sources in the composition: solar power and wind power. **Research** these technologies and discover how they work or create electricity. **Find** other sources of environmentally friendly power.

Maths: Do a power audit of your school and figure out how much money the school spends a day on electricity. **Suggest** ways for your school to reduce its carbon footprint.

7-12 Issues for discussion

Identify what you can see in this portrait. List the possible symbols. Explore how the artist has arranged the symbols to convey meaning. Describe the mood this work is projecting to the audience. Explore the effects of light and shadow on the mood of the work. What role does colour play?

'I've re-contextualised the various allegorical props in Holbein's painting to address the climate change debate with which my sitters are synonymous,' said Alexander.

This double portrait is an appropriation of Holbein's 16th-century masterpiece *The ambassadors* held by London's National Gallery. What are the similarities and differences between the two paintings?

What relevance does this portrait have to contemporary issues in science? What is the artist trying to communicate to the audience?



10. McLean Edwards
Tim Storrier

oil on canvas

McLean Edwards

Tim Storrier

oil on canvas

Tim Storrier has been a force in Australian contemporary art since winning the Sulman Prize in 1968 at age 19 – the youngest artist ever to receive the prestigious award. In 1994, he was awarded an Order of Australia (AM) for services to art.

Though Storrier's themes are constantly changing, he is renowned for mysterious, poignant landscapes that capture the melancholy vastness of the Australian outback. His famous blaze lines and fire paintings, which began to evolve in the 1980s, explore the stark, arid beauty of the country with its limitless, nocturnal starry sky and endless horizon.

'Tim is such a complex guy: extraordinarily intelligent, a charming and generous host, worldly – and always curious,' says McLean Edwards. 'But he also has limited time for trivial or self-indulgent people. So he can come across as somewhat dismissive or aloof. I painted him much as he sees himself: sartorially resplendent, bemused, challenging and a little regal. I suppose I see him that way too.'

Born in Darwin in 1972, Edwards studied at the Canberra School of Art and had his first solo exhibition in Canberra while still in year 12. He currently lives and works in Sydney. Edwards has been a past finalist in both the Archibald and Wynne prizes on numerous occasions. His work is held in major public and corporate collections throughout Australia and internationally.

K-6 Looking and interpreting

Visual Arts: Compare how the face and clothing have been painted. **Observe** the various patterns in the clothing. **Discuss** the various types of marks. **Experiment** in the classroom with creating and repeating patterns.

Visual Arts: Focus on the colours in the portrait. **Identify** the primary and secondary colours. Consider why the artist contrasted bold colours against the black night sky. **Observe** the daubs of yellow for the stars and imagine how McLean applied them. Do you think these were placed randomly or were they planned?

Links to KLAs

Maths: Find examples of patterns in the painting. What other patterns are there? **Design** a symmetrical pattern based on three colours. **Display** your patterns in the classroom.

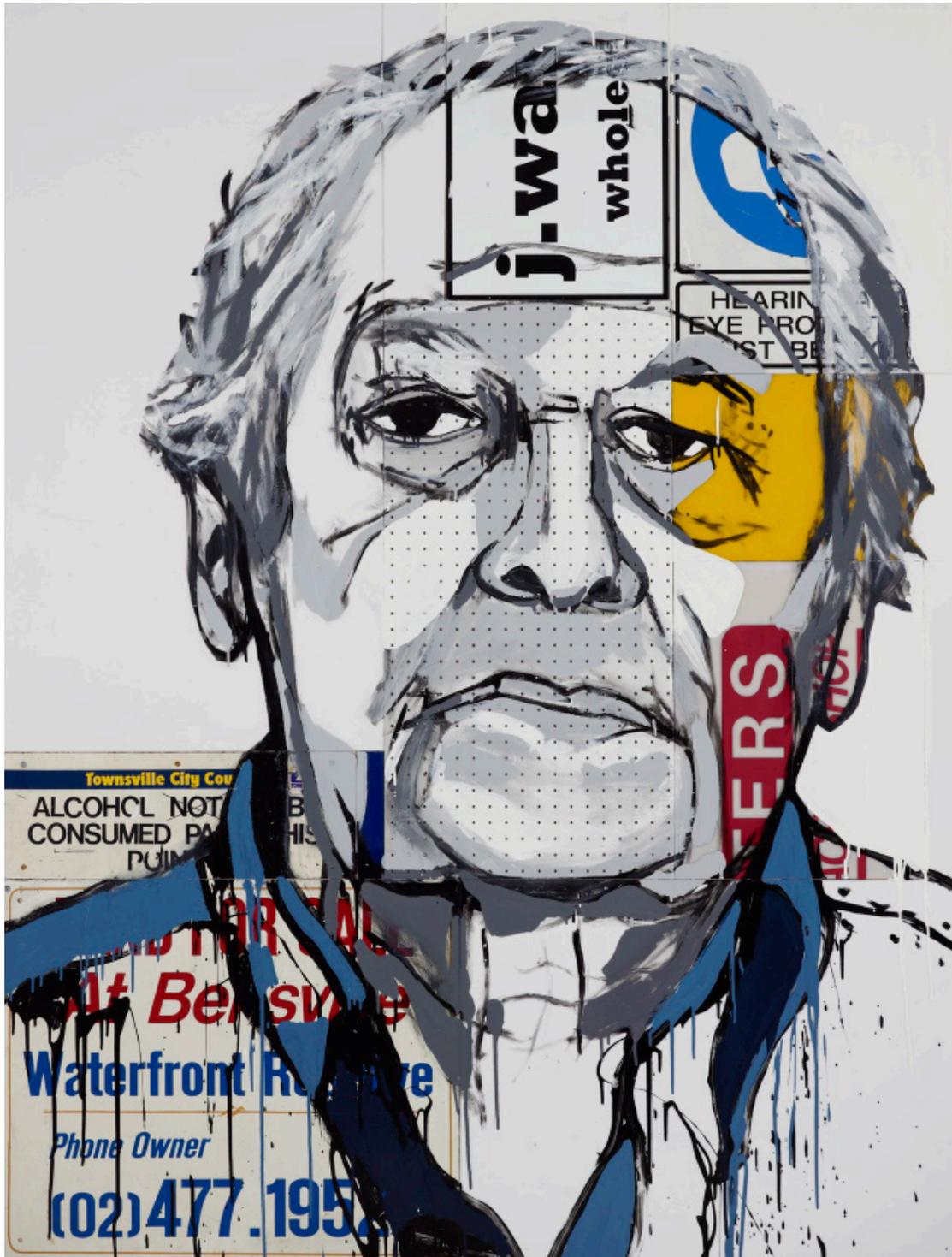
Drama: Find examples of artworks by Storrier. **Imagine** Storrier came to life off the canvas. What do you think his voice would sound like? **Write** a monologue for Storrier and perform it in class.

7–12: issues for discussion

Who is Tim Storrier? What does the expression on his face suggest he is feeling? Research his art practice. Does this portrait reflect his practice?

Why do you think Edwards has placed the subject in such a vast, nebulous space? Describe the mood this work is projecting to the audience. Explore the effects of light and dark on the mood of this work. What role does colour play?

What elements in this artwork suggest a contemporary approach to portraiture? Imagine the reaction the audience of the first Archibald Prize exhibition in 1921 would have towards this portrait.



15. Jasper Knight
Bill Wright AM

enamel, masonite, perspex and metal signs on board

Jasper Knight

Bill Wright AM

enamel, masonite, perspex and metal signs on board

Bill Wright is an artist and curator. He was assistant director at the Art Gallery of NSW from 1982 to 1991, artistic director of the 4th Biennale of Sydney in 1982 and curatorial director at Sydney's Sherman Galleries from 1992 to 2005. He has an Order of Australia (AM) for services to art.

'I've known Bill for about ten years,' says Jasper Knight. 'Choosing a subject for the Archibald can be quite a cynical exercise so it was nice to paint someone I know. Although he is such a big legend in the arts world, he is so humble, relaxed and fun to be around, and a very generous person.'

Knight is known for his bold mixed media works. Constructed out of plywood, perspex, masonite and various recycled materials, he uses enamel paint to create an interesting tension between the painting and sculptural aspects of the work.

This is his fifth portrait in the Archibald Prize – and, he believes, the best. 'I looked back over my previous entries and thought that the portrait of Richard Gill in 2005 stood out because it was a lot more surface heavy with different textures, which gave the face a lot of character. So with this one I wanted to use old signs. There's an 'alcohol not to be consumed' sign next to his right shoulder, a road sign near his left ear and eye, and a cash converter sign near his mouth that gives it a pinky softness.

'Normally my portraits are quite stylised, two-dimensional and illustrative but this one is softer and a bit more painterly. Bill has got quite an elegant, soft face and I wanted to convey that. I like warts-and-all portraiture so I wanted to capture his trademark facial expression without making him look too grumpy, so I have his right eyebrow raised as if lost in thought.'

Born in Sydney in 1978, Knight has a Bachelor of Arts (Electronic and Temporal Art) from Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney and a Master of Arts (Painting and Drawing) from the College of Fine Arts, University of NSW. He won the 2008 Mosman Art Prize and the 2005 Art on the Rocks Prize for Emerging Artists. He has also been a two-time finalist in both the Wynne Prize and the Blake Prize for Religious Art.

K-6 Looking and interpreting

Visual Arts: Look at the surface Knight has used? How has he created this surface? Identify the materials he has used? What effect does this have on the artwork?

Visual Arts: Knight has used textured brush strokes and has allowed paint to drip to create the portrait of Wright. Find other portraits in the exhibition that have used these techniques.

Visual Arts: List the warm and cool colours in this painting. Which colours has Knight used predominantly? What impact do these colours have on your impression of Wright?

Links to KLAs

PDHPE: How has Knight used line to create the idea of Wright's age? Discuss the different stages of life we go through. Imagine yourself as an adult and write a story about your life's journey.

Science and Technology: To create the artwork Knight has assembled recycled signs, perspex and peg board. Research the types of material that can be recycled within your school community. Evaluate the benefits of recycling.

Issues for discussion

Describe how Knight's painting style or the application of paint supports his portrayal of Wright. Is the style relevant to the sitter or more typical of Knight's method of painting? Does this affect the strength of the portrayal?

Describe the various surfaces Knight has used in this portrait. How do the materials Knight has used relate to our contemporary world? What effect does the inclusion of text have on the overall work?

How does Knight's work challenge the traditional notions of painting and portraiture? What other genres are represented in this artwork? Compare this work to that of the other finalists. Why do you think this work was chosen by the selection panel?

Focus works



18. Robert Malherbe
The squire – portrait of Luke Sciberras

oil on linen

Robert Malherbe

The squire – portrait of Luke Sciberras

oil on linen

Robert Malherbe has known landscape and still life painter Luke Sciberras for some years now. 'I first saw a show of his in 2001 and was impressed by the paintings. Later, when I met him, I discovered that he is flamboyant, gregarious and a one-man charm school,' says Malherbe.

Both artists show at the same gallery. Bumping into each other one day, they got talking and discovered that they liked many of the same artists and shared a similar approach to painting.

'What I wanted to capture in the portrait was a seductive character with human frailties,' says Malherbe. 'I hope these qualities come out in the portrait.'

It was painted at Malherbe's home. 'I prepared to paint while Luke charmed everybody,' he says. Then Malherbe put on a CD and he and Sciberras settled down for the sitting. 'He always wears scarves and hats so I wanted an image of him playing with his scarf. It's said that people who play with their ties have a desire to be liked. The painting was completed in 90 minutes and Luke said he loved the result.'

Malherbe himself was tempted to scrape the paint off and start again but left the work alone and found that it gradually grew and grew on him and his wife. 'Sometimes you paint someone's face and it doesn't look like a passport photo but it captures something of their essence,' he says.

Born in Mauritius in 1965, Malherbe came to Australia at age six. A self-taught artist who never went to art school, he received his art education by standing in front of some of the greatest paintings in some of the greatest galleries around the world. He has had eight solo shows in Sydney and Brisbane and his landscape entries in the Wynne Prize have twice been selected for the Salon des Refuses. This is his first time in both the Archibald Prize and the Wynne Prize.

K-6 Looking and interpreting

Visual Arts: Look closely at the texture of the painting. What do you think Malherbe used to apply paint to the canvas? **Describe** the type of brushstrokes Malherbe has used. Do you think Malherbe would have applied the paint quickly or slowly and carefully?

Visual Arts: Identify the colours you can see. **Describe** how this selection of colours makes you feel. **Use** the same colour scheme to paint a portrait of a person you enjoy being with and experiment with using broad gestural brushstrokes.

Links to KLAs

HSIE: Sciberras lives in Hill End, in regional New South Wales. **Research** the history of Hill End and find out why generations of artists have travelled there to paint the town and the surrounding landscape.

English: Write a description of this portrait using rich adjectives. Write a poem and review of the portrait based on your description. **Compare** the different writing styles.

Drama: Look at the hat Sciberras is wearing. What type of character do you think he would be? **Research** what a squire is and create a setting for a play in which Sciberras would be the focus.

Issues for discussion

What do you think Sciberras is thinking about? Is his a casual or formal pose? How does his pose engage the audience? Compare this painting to the other finalists. Identify the elements that make this a unique entry.

Consider the process Malherbe has developed to achieve the surface qualities of this work and experimentation he would have gone through to achieve this control over the texture of this portrait. Read the exhibition wall label and in class experiment with various mediums to imitate this process.

'Sometimes you paint someone's face and it doesn't look like a passport photo but it captures something of their essence,' said Malherbe. Study the portrait and reflect on Malherbe's quote. Debate in class the role of portraiture in the 21st century.

Archibald Prize 2010: finalists

1	Giles Alexander	The alternative ambassadors (Professors Ross Garnaut and Martin Green)
2	Martin Ball	Jacqueline Fahey
3	Kate Beynon	Self-portrait with guardian spirits
4	Shane Bowden and Dean Reilly	I wake up with Today!
5	Adam Chang	Two eyes – closing to open (Simeon Kronenberg)
6	Kordelya Chi	Mr Walker
7	Kevin Connor	Self portrait
8	Adam Cullen	Gareth at the country fair
9	Marc de Jong	Janice Petersen
10	McLean Edwards	Tim Storrier
11	Carla Fletcher	C W Stoneking
12	Robert Hannaford	Malcolm Fraser
13	Cherry Hood	Michael Zavros
14	Peter Kendall	Underdog
15	Jasper Knight	Bill Wright AM
16	Sam Leach	Tim Minchin
17	Alexander McKenzie	Andrew Upton
18	Robert Malherbe	The squire – portrait of Luke Sciberras
19	Nigel Milsom	Adam Cullen (bird as prophet)
20	James Money	The Lord Mayor of Melbourne
21	Nafisa	Glenn in black & white
22	Paul Newton	Self-portrait #2 – dark night of the soul
23	Khue Nguyen	Unleashed
24	Christine O'Hagan	Kate Ceberano
25	Rodney Pople	Stelarc triptych
26	Victor Rubin	John Olsen – A diptych – part I seated: part II in his bath
27	Craig Ruddy	The prince of darkness – Warwick Thornton
28	Paul Ryan	Danie Mellor, true blue country
29	Peter Smeeth	Peter FitzSimons, author
30	Ian Smith	Keith Looby alfresco
31	Greg Somers	Self-portrait with the picture of dory in grey
32	Nick Stathopoulos	The bequest
33	Yi Wang	Bishop Elliott and Lady Jacqueline
34	Apple Yin	The previous life