EDUCATION RESOURCE
REALMS OF VISION:
THE ART OF WILLIAM ROBINSON

MIDDLE YEARS 8-9
Realms of Vision Education Resource and Activities provide valuable support for educators wishing to include William Robinson in their Visual Arts program. This resource includes easy to read notes that can be used directly in the classroom along with activities for students designed to assist in learning before, during and after a visit to the Gallery.

These resources have been developed in alignment with the Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting (QCAR) Framework for Visual Art (Queensland Studies Authority, 2008) addressing outcomes for Year 9 and focusing on the Essential Learnings: Knowledge and Understanding, Creating, Presenting, Responding and Reflecting. These relationships are clearly labeled through abbreviated codes listed below.

This resource encourages students to:

> Develop an aesthetic and theoretical knowledge of specific concepts, facts and procedures
> Enhance understanding of arts elements, techniques, skills and processes
> Respond to artworks in an informed way
> Critically analyse and reflect on the processes of learning
> Value cultural and ethnic diversity as key to the presentation of identity
> Consider the role of the Visual Arts in reinforcing and challenging experiences and identities
> Recognise and appreciate the arts as a resource for the development of a successful recreational and professional life

The Gallery recognises that it is not always possible for students to visit the William Robinson Gallery. Our website features full colour images of artworks that appear in the Realms of Vision exhibition which are available for educators to use in the classroom. They can be found in the Exhibition > Current Exhibition section of the website, located at www.ogh.qut.edu.au/wrgallery

A GUIDE TO THIS RESOURCE

KU > relates to Knowledge and Understanding
CR > relates to Creating
PR > relates to Presenting
RS > relates to Responding
RF > relates to Reflecting
Free guided tours of *Realms of Vision* can be booked during the week and in conjunction with tours of the QUT Art Museum and/or Old Government House. *Realms of Vision* is on display until **Sunday, 22 August 2010**.

There’s no need to book for a self-guided tour, but we appreciate a call in advance if your group numbers ten or more. A thematic map of the exhibition is featured in this resource and can assist in guiding your group visit.

The William Robinson Gallery is located on the first floor of Old Government House on Main Drive at QUT Gardens Point Campus. School tours can meet at the northern courtyard entrance as indicated on the map below.

**VISITING THE WILLIAM ROBINSON GALLERY**

**OPENING HOURS**
- Sunday to Friday: 10am to 5pm
- Closed Saturdays, Good Friday and Christmas Day
- Free admission

**CONTACT DETAILS**
- William Robinson Gallery
- Queensland University of Technology
- GPO Box 2434 (2 George Street)
- Brisbane Qld 4001
- Tel: +61 7 3138 8005
- Fax: +61 7 3138 2175
- Email: ogh.enquiries@qut.edu.au
REALMS OF VISION
MAJOR THEMES

> Early works and the artist
> Farmyards
> Landscape
> Portraits
William Robinson's early works were strongly influenced by French artist Pierre Bonnard, who famously used bright colours to paint everyday interior scenes. After completing high school, Robinson went on to train as a primary school teacher, and was later awarded a scholarship to specialise in teaching art. Like most budding artists of the day, students learned by sketching the work of established artists, learning to mix paints and drawing figures by copying the artists they respected. For Robinson, Bonnard was one such artist.

Training as an artist back in the 1950s meant learning how to draw the human figure through practice. Students learned to draw ears, eyes and noses individually, and it wasn’t until later that they could graduate into a whole head or body. Practice made perfect and students often had to draw figures repeatedly until they were right.

Artists also had to learn to manipulate perspective. Having been taught by semi-modernist painters Melville Haysom and Arthur Evan Read, Robinson’s use of perspective is not always realistic. Their modernist style influenced his future landscape and farmyard works.

His early interiors were built from flat shapes of colour, bringing the background closer to the surface of the painting and creating very shallow pictorial space. They often feature flowers, hats and other still life elements, as well as patterned rugs, posing figures and unusual shadows.

Like his landscapes and farmyards, Robinson’s interiors express a deeper personal understanding of the subject matter and often depicted his own home or the homes of close friends and family members.

REALMS OF VISION
EARLY WORKS AND THE ARTIST

> Everyday interiors
> Formal elements versus subject matter
> Still life
> Composition
> Manipulating pictorial space
> Modernism
Sometimes the artist includes himself and his wife Shirley in his farmyard compositions. They never appear like farmers in charge of their animals, rather they’re intermingled with the animals, playing on the farm as if they’re equal. Aside from some farmyard equipment, Robinson’s farmyard paintings have flat backgrounds with no horizons—you might think the animals are floating in the air! This lets us focus on the animals and it means Robinson can fill his paintings with more animals than you’d expect. He takes care with his composition to show us plenty of animals so that the action spreads across the whole canvas. If he tried to paint an horizon in, it might look too overcrowded. Many artists will sacrifice realistic representation of objects or a place in order to express their ideas better.

Often only parts of the animals are visible, which makes it seem like Robinson’s paintings are just smaller snapshots of all the activity on his farm. By the time the Robinsons sold their farm, they had 40 chooks, six cows and about 70 goats!

**REALMS OF VISION**

**FARMYARDS**

- Animals exhibiting human characteristics
- Composition
- Humour
- Animals as family members
- Urban vs. rural life
In 1984, Robinson moved with his family to a farm at Beechmont in the Gold Coast hinterland. He remained there for the next ten years producing dramatic landscape paintings. Framed by steep cliffs and subtropical rainforest, the Robinsons’ property and its surrounds was a great source of inspiration to the artist.

Robinson would take long walks in the rainforest, observing the way light moves throughout the day and often he paints a whole day in a single painting. Sometimes the morning sky would be painted in one corner, with the darker evening or night sky painted in another. He is very interested in capturing time in his paintings.

Sometimes in the wet subtropical rainforest, Robinson would come across a puddle or stream that reflects the sky in an interesting way and paint that too.

The canopy of the rainforest is so high that when you look up to the sky it looks like trees are sprouting in every direction. The first thing many people notice about Robinson’s paintings is that the trees are growing in twisting directions and that it is hard to tell where the horizon is. A distorted horizon with curling trees and complex reflections makes it very hard to gain a normal perspective of the environment—you can’t tell where you are when looking at these landscapes.

Like a lot of Australian landscape painters such as Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale and Fred Williams, William Robinson is interested in multiple-point perspective, which means that there is no single vanishing point in his paintings. In this way he can represent more about the environment, expressing his knowledge and appreciation of the rainforest, while also emphasising the vastness of the Australian landscape. By not representing the landscape realistically, Robinson is able to show more about the passage of time and the magnitude of the rainforest, moreso than if he painted a “normal” landscape painting. He wants us to see and know the landscape like he does.

REALMS OF VISION
LANDSCAPE

- Multiple-point perspective
- Representation of time
- Vastness of Australian landscape
- Knowing and experiencing the landscape
- Presenting new views of the landscape

IMAGE:  
William Robinson has entered the prestigious Archibald Prize seven times with his self-portraits. Despite its importance, the Archibald Prize is often surrounded in controversy—which is why Robinson likes to poke fun at it. He sometimes thinks that the paintings entered into the Archibald are silly and once said that his 1987 entry, Equestrian self-portrait, was “silly enough” to win the Archibald Prize. He was right: Equestrian self-portrait won that year, and Robinson won a second time in 1995 with Self-portrait with stunned mullet.

In Equestrian self-portrait, Robinson was inspired by the story of Charles IV on horseback, a painting by Francisco de Goya that satirised the eighteenth-century Spanish king. Charles IV was a fat and foolish king who wanted a portrait painted of him riding a horse, even though he wasn’t known for horse riding. Normally equestrian portraits are painted of respected leaders or military figures, usually in a strong and powerful pose, but Goya painted Charles IV sitting still on a fat old horse, and didn’t make him look very impressive. The King didn’t realise that Goya’s painting was mocking him, but he liked it anyway.

Since the Archibald Prize shows paintings of important figures in Australian culture, William Robinson is trying to make fun of the seriousness of it all by painting himself as an uncomfortable farmer astride a horse. And just as Charles IV liked his mocking portrait, so Robinson won the Archibald Prize.

Robinson’s self-portraits are very personal to him, and they express emotions that he feels he can’t express any other way. Even though his self-portraits are famous, he doesn’t take them as seriously as he does his landscapes, which is why he is bold with them. He never sells them because he wants his wife Shirley to keep them, and he has even produced lithographic prints of these paintings to make sure that his grandchildren and great-grandchildren will see them too.

REALMS OF VISION
PORTRAITS

> Self-portraiture
> Satire
> Conventions of historical portraiture
> Expressing complex or private emotions through art
> Artist as profession
> The Archibald Prize
ACTIVITIES: IN THE CLASSROOM
EARLY WORKS AND THE ARTIST

1.1RS > Who is an artist that has inspired you? Select your favourite artwork by this artist and describe it below. Think about line, shape, colour, movement, size, texture, tone and perspective.

1.2 RF > What is it about the artwork you have described above that appeals to you?

1.3 CR > Think about your own home and what it looks like on the inside. Imagine that there is no furniture in your bedroom and quickly sketch an outline of the walls, windows and doors in the box. Think about how the artist you described above might draw this room.

> Now add some furniture and other things you might find in a bedroom. It doesn’t have to be the same as your real bedroom - use your imagination!

> Now add a figure to this composition. Add clothing, a hairstyle and accessories that represents who they are.

> Did you end up with a portrait or a self portrait?
1.4 RS > Find Interior, Birkdale, 1976 in the Gallery. Describe how Robinson has used light and shadow in this interior composition?

1.4 CR > Find a quiet corner in the gallery and do a rough sketch of the room you’re in. Think about how you might depict space, like other rooms visible through doorways, or outside areas seen through windows. Try to use the edge of a pencil to create shade and control light in your sketch. Identifying the light sources in the room you’re sketching might help you to follow their shadows.
ACTIVITIES: IN THE CLASSROOM

2.1 CR > Do you have any pets or know a friend or neighbour’s pet? Do you think they have their own personality? Describe their personality below?

2.2 CR > Do you live in the city or the country? Write down five things you like about where you live. How would your life change if you swapped from city to the country or country to the city?

2.3 CR > Think about an animal that you like. What kind of personality does it have? 
> Think about how you would represent this in a drawing and sketch the animal in the box.
> Some things that might help you start:

Where is the animal?
What is the animal doing?
Does the animal have friends or family around?
ACTIVITIES: DURING YOUR VISIT
FARMYARDS

2.4 RS > Find *Family portrait (Formal)*, 1980 in the exhibition and briefly describe what you see.

2.5 RS > *Family portrait (Formal), 1980* shares a unique feature with one other artwork in the exhibition. Look around the exhibition and find the other artwork. Write down the title of the artwork and then describe the feature and why you think it is important to both artworks. > A clue: think about the word *formal*.

TITLE....................................................................................................................................................

2.6 RS > William Robinson also made sculptures of his farmyard. Find the sculpture called *Farmyard I* and write down all of the different animals and objects you can see in it. Describe the story that is unfolding in the scene.
3.1 RF > Read Section 3 which talks about William Robinson’s landscapes. Write down why you think he paints landscapes.

3.2 RF > William Robinson often includes many views of the landscape in one painting. Write down why you think he does this. What is he trying to communicate?

3.3 CR > Think about an outdoor place near your home or somewhere that you visit often. One that you really love visiting and that you have been to during the day and night.

> In the box, sketch what this landscape looks like and include elements of the day and night.

> Some things that might help you start;

What does the sky look like and how does it change throughout the day?

Things look different in day light to light at night? How can you represent this?
3.4 CR > Have a look at all of the landscape paintings in the exhibition. Which one is your favourite? Make a quick sketch of it in the box and write down the title and year it was made below.

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<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
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3.5 RF > Describe the kinds of lines you made in your sketch. Are they long, short, straight, curved, bold or scratchy? Why do you think you drew them like this?

3.6 KU > Find the chronology of William Robinson’s life in the Gallery. Where was the artist living when he created the artwork you’ve just sketched? Write down one other fact about his life from this year.
ACTIVITIES: IN THE CLASSROOM

PORTRAITS

4.1 CR > Think of a funny situation you’ve been in and sketch a self-portrait reacting to that situation. It could be something embarrassing you’ve done or a funny thing you saw. Try to keep yourself as the focal point while filling in detail around you, this will help to communicate your story.

4.2 CR > If you could include one other person in a self-portrait, who would it be and why?
ACTIVITIES: DURING YOUR VISIT

PORTRAITS


3.5 RF > Do either of these portraits look similar to other works in the exhibition. If so, which ones?

3.6 RS > William Robinson often includes himself and his wife Shirley in artworks, including the landscape and farmyard works. Why do you think he does this?