I've been away – 16 days and almost 12,000 km (6,820 by air, 4,990 by road, and miscellaneous extras by boat). My mother and I flew direct from Sydney to Broome, a day trip up the Dampier Peninsula to Cape Leveque (Chomley’s Tours – highly recommended), wandered down to Perth (Outback Spirit – very highly recommended), then flew back to Sydney via Melbourne. This is a Big country.

We travelled with Outback Spirit last year too, exploring Arnhem Land and the Cobourg Peninsula, and I found that impossible to describe in a simple post (see my attempt 29-Aug-2013). This post will be just as incomplete – even more so as I’m saving some items for OCA course-related posts. For now a few photographs will have to suffice.

Overwhelmingly we saw land.

We saw water.
Lots of plants and animals,

and the traces of mankind.

Journal making with Adele Outteridge

Published July 25, 2014 5 - Inside; outside  ATASDA  OCA  Western Art  8 Comments
Tags: bookmaking, UWA-P5-other

Last month I attended a two-day ATASDA workshop with tutor Adele Outteridge, learning how to make personal journals. I had a mix of motivations:

* to create something rather than reading about other people creating things
* to mix with real live people rather than sit at my computer
* to extend my work
* to learn techniques that could be useful in presenting my work
* to find a way to ramp up my journal usage

For the first book we used coptic stitch with multiple needles.
We started by preparing multiple sections of torn paper. I went for a wide variety of different weights and types, many of which I had prepared ahead of time in my theme of bush walks near my home and in particular wattle. I covered the board covers with some lovely imported handmade paper.

Stitching was done with pairs of needles – mine used two pairs, so four needles in total. Once you get into a rhythm (cross-over, link; cross-over, link) it’s a pleasant process. Adele had a particularly effective teaching process. She would talk about and demonstrate just one or two steps, we’d each go and repeat on our books, and we wouldn’t continue until we were all ready and she’d helped anyone with problems. Then we got the next step. It meant we fully understood each part, because we did it ourselves. There was very little confusion, no frustration, and everyone in the class was happy with their results.

Most pleasing of all to me is that my new journal is a work in progress. It’s come on walks, had bark rubbings added, flowers encased between pages, and here a “page” of gumleaves supported on open-weave hessian added to the tabs / spacers conveniently included.

The second method we learnt was stitching over tapes. This is simpler as you only use one needle in the stitching.

The starting point is the same – preparation of sections of paper, cutting and covering of front and back boards. I wanted to use this journal as an ideas book for weaving – just because I never get/make time for weaving nowadays doesn’t mean I’m not thinking about it, and I want to remember potential projects when the time comes. I used alternating folios of gridded paper followed by drawing/watercolour paper.

I continued the tapes on the covers, making a woven pattern to fit with the theme of the book. Both the board covers and the tapes are more of the imported handmade paper, which has a wonderful texture to it.
Again the great thing about this book is that I am using it. As hoped, the blank page encourages me to think visually as well as verbally. The page size is just about right to catch a single idea. It also feels much more convenient to have ideas “condensed” in a single book instead of scattered through day books or in the margins of OCA course note-taking.


On the right is my first home-made attempt. It’s a little sketchbook, with alternating sections of grey and off-white paper (foolishly I didn’t make note of the specifics of the paper when I bought it). I used the four needle coptic stitching again. I think I got quite good tension and stitch-formation on this one.

Once again the exciting thing is that having this special journal is encouraging me to use it. The watercolour on the left is based on a section of Grace Cossington Smith’s The Lacquer Room (see 24-Jul-2014). In the past I’ve deliberately used a variety of papers and media, often A3 since I felt more comfortable at that scale. This smaller scale makes it easier time-wise, and I don’t end with oddments of single sheets floating around the workroom.

My most recent creation has a link to OCA coursework.

The next (and final) project is Landscape, and in one of the exercises we are asked to visit a landscape and draw or paint it for ourselves. As it happens I’ll be travelling through Western Australia on holiday, so I decided to make a sketchbook especially for the trip.

All the materials used were already in the house, which gives a nice feeling of self-sufficiency (quite illusory really, given the thread recently arrived in the post etc). The paper on the cardboard covers was protecting the table in past painting exercises. The ribbon tie weaves through the back, and I’m hoping will add some stability and protection on the trip. The paper is alternating 160 gsm drawing paper, which holds water colour quite nicely, and brown kraft paper, for note-taking and pencil sketches.
The basic format is landscape of course, but what I’m very smug about is the central folio of each section. Instead of just being folded in half, the paper is folded so it will open up into an extra-wide landscape format. After all, I’m expecting to see some very wide country!

I love, love, love this feeling of control and ownership. I’m able to consider my particular needs and to make something that I think will work for me.

The workshop was a great couple of days. For another view and some different books, see fellow-OCA student and ATASDA member Claire’s post [here](http://tactualtextiles.wordpress.com/2014/06/25/journal-making-workshop/). I’m looking forward to using some of the new skills to enhance presentation of my college work, although postal weight considerations will always be in play.

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**UA1-WA:P5-p1-Exercise: Annotate an interior view**

*Published July 24, 2014*  
*Tags: UWA-P5-annotation*

*The Lacquer Room* (1936) by Grace Cossington Smith (1892 – 1984) is the focus of my second annotation of an interior view. It’s a slight stretch to see this as “early twentieth-century”, but corresponds to the time-frames of the two suggested artists Matisse (1869 – 1954) and Dufy (1877 – 1953). The painting is on display at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) and is an example of exciting, vibrant, original, Australian art. Light, space and the relationship of figures to the setting are important elements in the painting of interiors, and I think this work provides an exceptional example of all.

*Grace Cossington Smith  
The Lacquer Room  
1936 oil on paperboard on plywood  
74.0 x 90.8 cm  

The image above from my phone’s camera has dulled all the colour, lost all the vibrancy and crispness of the original. The AGNSW website (link above) has a better but still not really good version.
The picture shows the basement café of a major city department store. On the right is shown a sketch Cossington Smith made at the café, including notes of colours and materials (the sketch is held at the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) – see http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/CossingtonSmith/Detail.cfm?IRN=133969).

**Tone**

Light shimmers in this painting. There are a few dark notes – shadow under tables, winter clothing – but most of the painting is in mid to high tones. The light has no obvious source. The wall-mounted Art Deco lights cast only a slightly increased light on the walls above them. The top of the free-standing lamp and the ceiling lights can’t even be seen. Instead an opalescent light suffuses the entire image, reflecting off surfaces to up-light faces. The light bounces around from the walls, floor, counter-sides, and mirror on the right. There’s so much light it is hard to believe this is a basement room (see a roughly contemporary photograph on the NGA site – http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/cossingtonsmith/Default.cfm?MnuID=2&GalID=4).

There is a darker bulk at the left of the image, women in dark hats and coats. This is cleverly balanced on the right by a truncated figure. Our eyes insert the additional weight.

**Line**

The lower part of the image is filled with curves repeating and echoing – chair backs, heads, bodies… The closer you look the more you see – hair, eyes, caps and saucers. There is a uniformity imposed that unites areas across the work.

However that is only the beginning of the lines.

Contrasting to the lower section, the top third of the picture is boxy, with vertical lines predominating (highlighted in green). Other lines (in pink) vary in direction, but remain straight, distinct, uncompromised.

The two sections are divided by one long gentle curve of countertop from one side of the picture to the other. They are linked vertically by curves which run from one shape to another – a man’s hair parting to a woman’s jaw, for example. A few verticals also venture into the lower section – where lines run amok. The strongest are the red of the chair frames, with a strong band of dischordant near-verticals traversing the image. The edges of tables veer in slightly “off” directions. The floor heaves up to the right. The overall effect is busy, but strangely harmonious. This is a working room, a bustling café, and there is a sturdy sense of order in the momentary disarray.

**Colour**

The picture is full of colour, particularly complementary colours. The immediately apparent colour contrast is red – green. At the bottom of the picture red chairs reflect in the green tabletop in a wide range of “reds” and “greens”, but blues with orange, yellows with purple are also well represented.
The oscillation of the vibrating contrasts adds to the luminosity of the image. Little dabs of repeated colour – blues in a coat seen again in tiny shadows on chair backs for instance – help to contain and unify what could have become chaotic.

Cossington Smith wrote of the genesis of this work “… I didn’t know it was there, but I just went down to get a cup of tea I think. And found this lovely restaurant. It was a great surprise to me. I was struck by its colour and general design … Scarlet, green and white held me spellbound. I quickly began drawing, writing the colours in words as I worked” (Cossington Smith, 1979). Colour was her inspiration. Writing colour names on her sketches was a standard part of her practice. Bruce James has suggested such notes “represented far more than a collective aide-mémoire. They constituted a chemical table via which the painter could conduct her polychromatic investigations into the dazzling Australian environments around her…” (2013, p. 34). James goes on to suggest that these notations were “so legible, so viable, so realisable” that the charting alone could be the full conception of the work, an early Sol leWitt.

**Technique**

Cossington Smith used distinct short, aligned brushstrokes to create the painting. Generally colour-mixing was done on the palette, or optically in the eye of the viewer. This increases the shimmering effect of the contrasting colours. The modern, highly reflective nitrocellulose paints used in the café itself are captured in matte oil paint – “Light reflecting from the shiny surfaces is cleverly captured through broken swatches of colour” (Dredge, 2013, p. 118).

The distinct brushstrokes allowed the use of many colours without muddying, maintaining the bright, clean feel of the picture. The direction of the strokes provides some modelling of forms otherwise flattened in the patterning, and at the same time provide a unity and stability to the pulsation of light and colour.

**Space**

There is a definite sense of depth in the painting. In the centre the eye is funneled in, through an empty space between patrons and tables to a waitress, then on behind the counter to be stopped by the back of another worker. However on closer inspection the space makes no sense – it is flattened and distorted. Tables dip and bend, their sides twisted from perspective lines. Just left of centre is the dominant figure of a man sitting behind a table – but where is woman who appears just to left of him? Is she sitting at the same table, but somehow just behind it as well? That seems to be her hand, but too large – or is the man possibly waving to us? In which case is the woman at another table further back? Behind this couple is one waitress apparently taking an order, and another possibly serving someone – but who, and how can there be space for them?

Space is sacrificed to pattern, to pleasing rhythms and repetitions. This is an interior, but not one we can really enter.

The various figures are firmly occupying their positions, especially those seated, but there is little relationship between them. Even those sitting at the same table do not interact. Most of those seated look out of the painting at us – or really at Cossington Smith in the act of sketching them. The café workers seem busy, solicitous to the needs of their customers – but which customers? None of those we can see. Faces are sketchy or not described at all, and one patron is cut off right through her face.

**Modern, urban**

This is a bright, modern, dynamic, urban scene. Although an introspective and solitary figure, Cossington Smith found urban scenes a source of energy and exuberance. The ‘Soda Fountain’ in the lower ground floor of David Jones was everything fresh, modern and exciting.
– art deco fixtures, American influences, an interior possibly designed by fellow artist Thea Proctor (McNeil, 2013, p. 98).

While celebrating the material aspects of modern life, The Lacquer Room also suggests disquiet at the human impact – “... in this colour- and light-filled vision, the darkly dressed patrons who sit silent, mostly solitary and hardly welcoming in their cartoon glances, continue to express the artist's ongoing reserve at the strangers the modern city makes of its inhabitants” (Edwards, 2013, p. 148).

The Lacquer Room is a complete contrast to The first born by Gaston La Touche (see 19-Jul-2013). La Touche created his work to please the jurors of the Paris Salon. Cossington Smith had financial security allowing her to follow her own vision. La Touche created an idealised view of the life of the poor worker, Cossington Smith observed and celebrated her own environment. Colour and techniques are obviously entirely different, as are space (depth, flattening / patterning) and the relationships of the people within. La Touche explored morning light through the window while Cossington Smith suffused her work with modern electric lighting. I think the pair make a good introduction to the interior view in painting.

References


UA1-WA:P5-p1-Exercise: Annotate an interior view – 2
Understanding Art 1 – Western Art
Part 5: Inside, outside
Project one: The interior
Exercise: Annotate an interior view – 2

UA1-WA:P5-p1-Exercise: Annotate an interior view – 1
Published July 19, 2014 5 - Inside; outside 5.1 The interior 326062 Uncategorised Western Art 1 Comment
Tags: UWA-P5-annotation

This final part of the course begins with the interior – first as represented in paintings, then as an architectural space.

We are asked to annotate two interior views, and for my first I have chosen The first born by Gaston La Touche (1883) – an example of a nineteenth-century genre painting. The painting hangs in the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), in my opinion was the best match to exercise requirements currently on display, and had personal appeal in the sense of light and the hint of a textile connection.
This large, square picture was awarded a second class medal in the Paris Salon of 1888 and was purchased from the Salon for AGNSW.

The painting shows a bedroom in a working-class home. A child, the first of the family, has been born and can almost be glimpsed in the straw-line cradle. The new mother sleeps, exhausted after what may have been a difficult birth. The young father sits on a rough wooden box at the foot of the bed, leaning wearily. An older woman, perhaps the grandmother, watches over the family as the light of a new day enters through the curtained windows.

A series of strong verticals structure the image. A range of diagonal and nearly-horizontal lines, shown in green on the diagram, create the space of the interior. We are looking into a bedroom, perhaps standing in the doorway. The window is deeply set with a small platform, separated from the main room by a light curtain.

The main elements of the image are contained in a smaller area, outlined in pink in the diagram. There are the three adults, the crib, and another presence – a religious image.

Most of the light in the picture is entering through the large window, and it is beautifully dispersed by the sheer curtains. There may be some additional light assumed from the doorway, otherwise it is reflected light which brightens the back of the man’s shirt.
The light is particularly varied and beautiful around the head of the older woman – reflected from the curtains onto her face, gleaming through what I assume is flax on her distaff, highlighting the shaping of her cap. In addition a small beam of light reaches over the pillow to find the head of the sleeping mother.

The colour palette is limited, mainly shades of yellow and brown, with touches of pink in the robe folder over the end of the bedstead and the shawl of the watching woman. There is a wide range of tones, with that bright white morning light touching each of the main figures, and contrasting dark shadows in other areas.

Large areas of the image are left bare – texture on the walls and floor – which provides general interest while keeping focus on the main action of the image. However there are also areas given careful attention, such as the still-life of jug and bottles on the rush chair seat, and the wooden box supporting the man.

The general genre of narrative painting of interiors has its base in Dutch art of the seventeenth century, when the wealthy merchant class looked to spend their new wealth on works of art to adorn their homes. Such paintings would be small, suited to the domestic scale, detailed, and show a familiar rather than mythological or religious scene, often with a moral message. Most of those criteria apply to *The first born* except for the scale. This is a large work, designed as an entry to the Salon. The picture was well received in that environment, a report from that time including “Each actor of this familiar scene is exhibited in the simplest, truest and most impressive attitude, and the light, sifted through the large curtains, enters soft and clear into the humble dwelling, filling its naked walls with a pleasant, subdued radiance. Nothing is abandoned to purr sentimentality, but yet a chastened tenderness seems to be diffused throughout the chamber. M. la Touche has here produced a powerful and exquisite work” (Gazette des Beaux Arts, 1888).

Despite this measure of success, La Touche did not continue with such themes for many more years. He destroyed many of his early work, and in 1891 “consigned fifteen years work to the flames of a bonfire in a single day” (Brindley & Maclennan, [n.d.]). Presumably the AGNSW work was saved by its sale and voyage to Australia.

The Walters Art Museum suggests “As a mature artist, [La Touche] broke with his realist beginnings to paint in a harmonious decorative style that reflects the influence of the Rococo painters of the 18th century” (The Walters Art Museum, [n.d.]). From the web image it’s certainly difficult to reconcile the two paintings from the same hand. Another work, *Pardon in Brittany* (1896) in the Art Institute Chicago.
while apparently using a broader palette and quite different technique, shows a handling of light much more in keeping with his earlier work. La Touche was part of the Paris art café scene and received advice from Manet and in particular Felix Bracquemond. It is interesting to see a basically classic, academic (although not academically trained) artist producing "vigorous, harsh and somber" works (Turner, 1996?) modify his work to such an extent.

References


UA1-WA:P5-p1-Exercise: Annotate an interior view – 1
Understanding Art 1 – Western Art
Part 5: Inside, outside
Exercise: Annotate an interior view – 1

This Part of the course has been a struggle. I'm struggling with time; with depth – how far to go in research; and with focus, with a desire to get back to my own work, to be making, creating.

Looking back through my blog posts for over the last 4+ months there seems to be an ongoing theme of the politics and social meaning of art. It started with political cartoons, using images to comment on a current and continuing crisis (7-Mar-2014). Selecting busts of Trucaninny and Woureddy as examples of portrait sculpture allowed a more general consideration of the impact of colonisation and the implicit condescension of an "ethnographic" attitude (13-Mar-2014).

The annotation of Maurice Felton's portrait of Mrs Alexander Spark provided a strong contrast in social conditions and also introduced (but did not develop) feminist concerns (19-Mar-2014). When visiting the National Portrait Gallery (11-Apr-2014) it all started getting too big for me – too much history I didn't know, too many competing issues. My next annotation glanced at the art politics of the Archibald Prize, but is in honesty a bit brief and shallow (13-Apr-2014). (The 2014 Archibald opens in a few days)

As a generalization, of all the genres of art I am least moved by or interested in portraits. . . As soon as I wrote that sentence I questioned myself, it seems ridiculous to be so sweeping – but with many exceptions, it's basically true. I just scrolled through the finalists of the 2014 Archibald – http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/2014/. So many of them are a lump of person (head, 3/4, full view) in a limited background. There seems to be a fair amount of effort for a likeness, perhaps with a few ‘tabs of identity’ like a painterly cartoon. I recognize the subject and feel vaguely clever, or I don't and I can read some facts about them. I can't tell myself a story about them because there's a "correct answer". As always, there are exceptions. I was intrigued by the photo of Mike Barnard’s You beautiful fighter (http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/2014/29472/), and having read the artist’s statement I am still more moved by both the subject and the way he has based his technique
on the story and the emotion. I’m looking forward to seeing the actual works when the
exhibition opens.

Annotating Discobolus, a classical sculpture, returned my
thoughts to questions of idealization, race and colonisation
(23-May-2014). Combined with the impossibility of visiting a
cast gallery and reflection on why that should be so (30-
May-2014), the whole question of the Canon of western art
was raised again. Whose heritage, what values, are being
celebrated? In the next research point we were directly
challenged on this, looking at the female nude through art
history and the insights provided by a feminist critique (6-
Jun-2014). I found introducing multiple perspectives
enriched my experience of the artworks. Unfortunately the
next exercise, annotating a female nude (8-Jun-2014), just
made me cranky. First we were required to work on a
classic nude in the western tradition, which forced me back onto internet images. We were
then asked to compare this carefully selected masterpiece to a more recent work by a little-
known female artist. I question the purpose of this requirement, which seems to me to
trivialize important questions about women as artists and the depiction of women in art.

A calming review of figure sculptures of the
past century brought home how fortunate I’ve
been in terms of access to artworks (13-Jun-
2014). This was followed by the annotation of
a Henry Moore sculpture (22-Jun-2014), in
which I concentrated on ideas taken from the
feminist critique, and also the context of work
in a physical sense. The work by Moore on
the right has only very recently been put on
display at the Art Gallery of New South
Wales (AGNSW), but makes a whimsical
addition which could loosely be seen as
“figure”.

Perhaps the most important thing I feel I have
gained from the course so far is the
ability to see artworks in context – historical,
physical, thematic... In this I am greatly
assisted not only by the course learning
material, but by my local gallery, the AGNSW.
Limited in space, with a major expansion years
away, there is constant movement of the works
displayed. Rather than a single work by an artist
there will be a group of works, together with a
couple of related or complementary pieces by
other artists. A month or so later they could be
gone. Recently the Kirchner I discussed as my
Assignment 4 was moved upstairs and can now
be seen together with a sculpture by Ossip
Picasso, amongst other delights (the Picasso glimpsed in the photo, Woman lying on a couch
(Dora Maar) (1939) doesn’t have a link, as it is on loan from the Lewis collection).

I feel this Part of the course has been a mixed bag – due to access to works, interest in the
topics, this that and the other, and always, always time. I have a small pile of brochures and
notes from exhibitions and events, just waiting for a write up – sometime soon.

UA1-WA:P4 Review
Understanding Art 1 – Western Art.
Part 4: Portraiture and figure painting
I have chosen to analyse *Three bathers* by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner for this Assignment. It fits with the general theme of this part of the course, “Portraiture and figure painting”, it is available for me to view personally, and it was painted by a leader of German Expressionism, one of the founders of Die Brücke, at a critical time in Western history.


For the assignment I traced the main shapes on the computer then printed multiple versions on A3 paper. I used these at the gallery to make notes, but have chosen here to recreate them in clean electronic versions for greater clarity.

**Tone**

This is not a painting of high contrasts. On the right I’ve used a desaturated version of the image, indicating highlights in yellow and deeper tones in purple. Both are distributed across the picture.

Dark tones form a perimeter around the painting, enclosing and framing the scene. Smaller areas are used to create shadows and definition on the figures.

The areas of lightest tone are the foam of the breaking waves, a closer frame encircling the figures. Highlights on the bodies model their forms. The light seems generally to be falling from above on the left, but it is not consistent. There is reflected light on the inside of thighs. One of the lightest areas is the palm of the left hand on the rightmost figure. This draws attention to a darker area, and also emphasises the awkward stance of the woman. The jellyfish and in particular the bird also include light areas, drawing attention to these rather odd additions to the scene.
A black and white threshold version of the image helps to identify the focus placed on the main objects by the overall use of light and dark.

The feathery, fluttering forms of gull, foam splash and jellyfish surround the solid blocks of the figures. The sea, the entire environment, is hidden in dark depths.

**Line**

Shown in light blue/turquoise on the diagram, there is a series of lines across the width of the picture leading down to the right. They follow the crests of the waves behind and in front, connecting the figures especially along shoulders and a long, stretched leg, and in a combination of bird wing and waves in the upper right.

However the image as a whole is not sliding off to the right. The space between the front figure and the edge makes this clear. There are also bolstering, protective lines, shown in green, pushing back on the right and pulling/anchoring on the left. In red are strong vertical lines, particularly in the front-most figure, resisting the surge and providing a stability (although on a practical note, from personal experience I suggest such an attempt to maintain balance in the swell will be ultimately unsuccessful). There are no horizontal lines, although in purple I have shown a few balancing, almost restful, movements in the ocean swell.

There are lines in the figures going in almost every direction – those descending diagonals, also including heads, jaws, breasts, but these are countered by slightly less strong opposite diagonals, and also the erect front figure. This supports the idea of a captured moment in time, of dramatic change about to happen, a tense calm before the (overwhelming?) force of the wave hits and the figures are tumbled and overturned. Renée Free suggested that “the successive repetition of the line of the wave opposed by the verticality of the figures stiffening to ward off the threat, creates the sense of psychological and physical clash by compositional means” (Free, [n.d.]), and certainly the sense of threat and unease is strong.

The jellyfish provides a strange, ambiguous moment. There are so many lines, but there is no sense of a prevailing movement. I imagine it riding up the face of the wave then bobbing down, without anchor, at the mercy of the forces surrounding it – but within itself unmoved, in its element. A side note: this same object is seen by Donald Gordon as a “weed-covered rock” (Gordon (1968, p.92). I have returned to the original, but cannot accept this.

**Colour**

On first view the picture appears to have a limited colour palette – largely blue-greens and yellow-orange-tans. Renée Free in an AGNSW publication ([n.d.]) suggested Kirchner’s colours were those used by Picasso and Braque, as in this painting of Braque’s, derived in turn from Cézanne. Free also quotes Donald Gordon’s comments about the monumentality of Three bathers, evidenced in part by the “starkly simple colour scheme, playing off the blue-green of the waves against the orange hues of the figures”. I think these comments over-simplify what is actually a very complex use of
The cubists were interested in form and worked with a restricted palette. Kirchner made complex use of colour, together with brush technique discussed below, to model form.

On the right I’ve picked out just a few of the many touches of red and green that can be seen in the “orange” figures.

The most obvious use is on the lips, suggesting lipstick and the dislocation of urban figures into a natural environment. However there are reflections and touches of red in the shadows of the jaw, the hair, a trace on the upper chest…

That awkwardly turned hand of the rightmost figure is detailed in red, further highlighting its importance in the composition.

This complex use of colour is very different to the throbbing slabs of colour of works by Kirchner only a few years earlier, such as Four Bathers, 1910 (the best images I found were page 9 of https://static.royalacademy.org.uk/files/kirchner-student-guide-13.pdf and http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/full.php?id=57263). The differences could be due to a different location and light (the Moritzburg lakes rather than Fehmarn on the Baltic coast as in the focus painting), the tension of the threatening political situation, a move away from the influence of the fauves, or the new painting techniques Kirchner had developed.

Technique

Kirchner used a range of techniques in different areas of the painting. The multiple layers of hatching used to model the forms of the figures is particularly interesting.

An early influence on Kirchner and other members of the Brücke group was tribal art seen at the Dresden Ethnographic Museum and coming from Palau, a Micronesian island at that time a colony of Germany. An angular mode began to appear in Die Brücke works. This was followed in Kirchner’s case by an interest in Buddhist cave paintings from Ajanta, India (see examples at http://www.indian-heritage.org/painting/ajanta/ajanta9.html). Kirchner wrote of these frescos “They are all plane and yet absolute mass and, accordingly, they have absolutely solved the mystery of painting” (quoted in Gordon (1987) p. 77). Donald Gordon explained “in the course of 1911 [Kirchner] devised a zigzag hatching technique to model such
rounded forms, both in his drawings and his paintings”. In Gordon’s account the frescos helped Kirchner to consider means of representing forms in two dimensions, part of the “fundamental ambivalence between sculptural and pictorial values, between representation and decoration, that lay at the heart of Expressionist style” (Gordon, 1987, p. 77). In this context it is particularly interesting to view Kirchner’s carving Lying Woman (1911 – 1912) – see http://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/asset-viewer/lying-woman/cgEFqq71_NKCYQ?projectId=art-project.

This section shows that Kirchner used a broader version of the zig-zags to create the volume of the waves in the upper left section of the picture. The crest of the wave behind is a dense, heavy mass of greens, reaching over to stab down on the women. There is a lovely, wide, more open zigzag in dark blue further to the left, describing the deep swell of the sea. Elwyn Lynn wrote of this work “All is vibrating. The nudes come to look unsubstantial, the brushstrokes indicate a nervous uncertainty” (Lynn, 1984). In my eyes the figures are solid and three dimensional, but certainly their situation appears temporary. The broader, more integrated brushwork on the sea generally suggests a swelling force, the descending crest a crashing power, that cannot be resisted.

The frothy mass of the smaller wave that has broken in front of the figures uses an impasto technique, with thick blobs of paint, dribbles and flutters creating depth and movement. In person the lumps catch fragments of light, creating still more life and sparkle. In the splash to the right of the picture the dribbles break up into feathery lines of foam. Elsewhere complex layers of colour suggest the depth and mystery of the turbulent waters.

Symbology

In considering the symbology apparent in the picture, it is useful to review the changes Kirchner made from an initial crayon sketch to the final work.

The image of the sketch is taken from a copy in Darby (1985). The most significant change made was to the left-most figure, transforming from a male to a female. This provides a clear reference to the symbology of the Three Graces. James Hall provided a number of alternate meanings and attributes of this trio – “the personification of grace and beauty”; “the threefold aspect of generosity, the giving, receiving and returning of gifts”; “three phases of love, beauty, arousing desire, leading to fulfillment; or “the personification of Charity, Beauty and Love” (Hall, 2008, pp. 312 – 313). Given the erotic nature of much of Kirchner’s work the phases of love seem fitting, but there is a certain stiffness and remoteness about the figures which partially negates this. These Graces are awkward rather than graceful.

The Three Graces are also frequently seen as attendants to a goddess, in particular Venus. The sprays of foam around the feet of the figures is certainly reminiscent of the familiar image of Botticelli’s Birth of Venus (http://www.uffizi.org/artworks/the-birth-of-venus-by-sandro-botticelli/), although here there is no gentle breeze caressing, or shy shielding of bodies. When looking at mythological paintings earlier in the course we were asked if these could still be relevant, and I think this more modern take with its edge of unease is a meaningful update.

This is not the only instance of myth in Kirchner’s work. Judgement of Paris (1913) is held by the Wilhelm-Hack Museum (see
Another interesting comparison is *La ville de Paris* (ca. 1911) by Robert Delaunay – see http://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/asset-viewer/la-ville-de-paris/uQEJzCuAIO4mvQ?projectId=art-project. Here the three graces are seen in an urban environment, very clearly Paris. In this, “while still interested in portraying simultaneous views of his subjects, [Delaunay] rejected Cubism’s privileging of line over color and its virtual elimination of visual sensation through its muted palette” (The Toledo Museum of Art, [n.d.]). There is no angst or alienation here, and the colours as seen on the computer image are beautiful.

A second area of change from the sketch is the alignment of the bird to the upper right. The inward pressure in the final picture is an important structural element. Darby, following Hall, suggests this is a “symbol of air, one of the four elements”. This interpretation would highlight the absence of any land, let alone fire, to be seen. Venus can be associated with doves or swans, but this bird looks more like a seagull – which I’ve seen referred to as both good and bad omens for seamen.

The third change marked is the size, positioning and detail of the jellyfish. Darby again finds a mythological link, with “girdle of venus” a colloquial name for jellyfish. My internet search suggests this is a particular, flat, ribbon-like jellyfish, quite unlike the one shown in the painting. However the name could perhaps be used more generally. The change of position and sharpening of shape allows the jellyfish to provide an inverted continuation of the line of elbows and breasts across the canvas.

The sea is the birthplace of Venus, or Aphrodite (a name which may be associated with aphros, foam). Water is the source of life, and the threat of drowning; it can cleanse or engulf; the sea can be therapeutic, health-giving; it can be dark and mysterious; it is an unstoppable, undeniable force of nature. The figures stand in this seething mass, and their own position and nature is ambiguous. Their feet can’t be seen – are they mermaids rising from the depths? And come to that, where is the painter? He seems to be below, looking up, but there is no sign of the shore. He must be awash.

**Expressionism**

Donald Gordon wrote that “the prime emotional state of Expressionism is tension, ambiguity, ambivalence” (1987, p. xvi). The artists are reacting to their society and situation, anxious and critical of the stresses and alienation of urban life, rebelling. There was fear and hope – “central to the Expressionist enterprise was reciprocity: hope as answer to fear, decline as prerequisite for renewal” (ibid, p. 3).

In the Museum of Modern Art in New York is a canvas by Kirchner which vividly illustrates these concerns and ambivalence – http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=78426. On the front of the canvas is *Street, Dresden* (1908; reworked 1919; dated on painting 1907). Using heightened colours, Kirchner shows “figures with masklike faces and vacant eyes in an attempt to capture the psychological alienation wrought by modernization” (MoMA, 2009). The scene is crowded, bustling, airless, but each figure is alone in the crowd. On the reverse is a natural landscape, and nude women bathing. Continuing the theme of ambiguity, Gordon discusses this same work in comparison to Munch’s *Evening on Karl Johan Street*. There is the same “aura of decadence” and “anxious expressions”, but Gordon concludes that “despite protestations, Kirchner at some level wanted the Munch connection to be seen – in order to stress his conversion of a gloomy attitude into a gayer one” (Gordon, 1987, p. 29).

**Nature and the City**
The figures in this picture have chosen to bathe in the sea, but they are uncomfortable, alien. Rather than nurturing, nature surrounds and threatens. A bird arrows in, a jellyfish comes up behind perhaps about to sting, water is everywhere, about to mindlessly destroy. The individual will be lost to greater forces.

Lynn (1984) compared this to the painting by Braque shown above: “Braque gives order and completeness to nature; Kirchner tears it asunder with a conflict of adventurousness and timidity, threats and naive aspirations to harmony”. This is consistent with the ambiguity and tension of Expressionism. Will the bathers actually be overcome? Darby (1985, p.5) suggests that while “vulnerable and at the mercy of the elements” the figures “seem set to triumph over the threat and survive to be further fortified by nature”. This suggests the health-giving, restorative qualities of the sea are ultimately stronger than its mindless force.

Around the time of this painting Kirchner embarked on his series of urban street scenes, showing the decadence and moral and personal disintegration of the city. Darby continued “[Kirchner’s] paintings of prostitutes in the streets of Berlin, painted immediately after Three Bathers provide a contrast; his bathers retain some hope.”

Hope, War and beyond
Where Darby sees hope, Gordon sees something else – “the facial expressions of all three bathers and, particularly, the protective bunching of the shoulder muscles behind the neckless head of the rear figure betray an emotion which up to now was lacking in Kirchner’s imagery: fear” (Gordon, 1968, pp. 91-92). This directly raises the political situation of the time. In the summer of 1914 Kirchner and his companions were forced to flee early from their annual retreat in Fehmarn, following the declaration of war. On the journey home Kirchner was twice mistaken for a Russian spy.

Kirchner was an ‘involuntary volunteer’, signing up as an artillery driver to avoid conscription to the infantry. He suffered a series of mental and physical breakdowns. In Self-Portrait as a Soldier (1915 – see http://www.oberlin.edu/amam/Kirchner_SelfPortrait.htm) Kirchner brutally records the damage and loss he feared as both artist and human being. The model in the background shows many similarities to the figures in Three Bathers – a life and world now irrelevant and powerless.

In 1916 Kirchner painted a mural in the Sanatorium where he was staying.
The panel on the right seems to show a return to the Three Graces. The central figure is now seen from back, a more classical presentation. The “jellyfish” is definitely a rock, the bird of omen is now nearly past. The figures are now deeper, up to their waists in water, and the black smoke of modern engines is seen above. Can we claim that the worst has happened, the cataclysm hit, and the gaunt survivors have come to some kind of accommodation to their new reality? Are individuals once more able to connect with each other, to find a measure of freedom and joy?

For Kirchner himself it seems his life continued to be a struggle. Towards the end of his life he wrote “Did you know that as far back as 1900 I had the audacious idea of renewing German art? … I wanted to express the richness and joy of living, to paint humanity at work and at play in its reactions and interreactions and to express love as well as hatred…” (quoted in Gordon, 1987, p.2). Kirchner admired the works of earlier German painters such as Cranach and Dürer (in this assignment I haven’t considered Three Bathers in the context of the history of nude paintings, but there is obvious potential for comparisons with Cranach’s The Three Graces, (1535 – see http://nelson-atkins.org/collections/iscroll-objectview.cfm?id=19958) and Dürer’s The Four Witches (1497 – see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Four_Witches, which could potentially be viewed as Aphrodite and the three graces)).

Instead of leading a new, vital German art, in 1926 Kirchner wrote “Modern German painting has moved so far away from me and become unintelligible in areas in which my work had, and still has, an influence…” (quoted in Kornfeld and Stauffer, 1992, p. 10). In 1933 the situation had worsened. Kirchner wrote “In the museums, the hard-won cultural achievements of the last 20 years are being destroyed, and yet the reason why founded the Brücke was to encourage truly German art, made in Germany. And now it is supposed to be un-German. Dear God. It does upset me.” (ibid, p. 12). In 1937 works by Kirchner were confiscated as part of the German campaign to ‘cleanse’ modern art, works by Kirchner were included in the “Exhibition of Degenerate Art”, and he was expelled from membership of The Academy of Arts in Berlin. In 1938 Kirchner took his own life.

Textile afternote:
I’m always happy to find textile connections when researching artists. Kirchner designed both embroideries and tapestries, although the only online images I’ve found is a small one of Black Spring, 1929 executed by Lise Gujer (http://www.bruecke-museum.de/sammlung_horn.htm) and some large stitching on a tablecloth in a photograph of Kirchner’s studio in Berlin in 1912 (http://fiftytwopieces.blogspot.com.au/2009/06/ernst-ludwig-kirchner-portraits-and.html). There was a flow-back into Kirchner’s painting, in what is called his “tapestry style” – see http://www.thearttribune.com/Ernst-Ludwig-Kirchner.html#nb2.

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I wrote about Henry Moore for a Research Point on abstract sculpture back in Part 3 (see 15-Dec-2013). Wanting to avoid too much repetition I’ve decided to meet this current requirement by looking at particular aspects of works previously mentioned.

Henry Moore
Reclining figure: Angles
1980
bronze, green patina
113.3 x 219.6 x 156.8 cm; 10.8 cm bronze base

This work was created late in Moore’s career, but the subject recurs throughout his work. Examples are included in his textile work – the large wall hanging Reclining figure of 1949 (linen printed by Ascher, see TEX 21.1 on http://www.henry-moore.org/hmf/press/press-releases/henry-moore/past-press-releases/henry-moore-textiles/henry-moore-textiles) and Reclining Figures 1944-46, which includes a body position very similar to the later focus sculpture (TEX 8.2 on http://www.henry-moore.org/pg/exhibitions/archive/2009/henry-moore-textiles-at-pallant-house-gallery).

In my earlier post I found the distortions in the body somewhat unnerving, and suggested “this work seems to have no reason or meaning beyond Moore’s interest in working with volumes and forms”. Given my more recent studies, can my previous views stand?

First I should note a potential fallacy underlying my comment on the similarity of Moore’s reclining nudes of the mid 1940s and forty years later. A superficial similarity does not mean the works come from the same interests and point of view with no development or progression (which statement itself should not imply that development or progression are necessarily good or essential).

In recent exercises I have studied the reclining nude through art history. The focus work here is part of the continuation of that history, however I believe it does not trigger many of the issues within a feminist critique. Moore’s figure is not an idealization of the female form. It is a distortion, which could be interpreted as a violent act, but I see this as more using the figure...
as a known starting point in an exploration of volumes. The figure is not asleep or submissive or challenging in its gaze (if one stands “in front” to give the viewpoint of the classical painting). Instead she turns to direct her gaze elsewhere, to the side and over the viewer. Personally I don’t see this as a particularly seductive or erotic figure, although I note the polishing effect of the many hands which must have touched her breast over the years, entirely removing any patina.

The distortion of the figure could be related to Moore’s interest in surrealism, in particular a concern with metamorphosis. In his sketchbooks Moore could morph bones, stones or other natural items towards a human form. There is also an element of abstraction, although in this example the human figure is still clearly evident. For Moore “abstraction was a tool, not an objective” (Causey, 2010).

The head is small compared to the bulk of the body and the facial features generalised, but there is still a clear facial plane, lines of hair, and an interesting echo and reversal in the shaping of the hair and the nose.

Earlier works by Moore can show a fragility, even an anguish, perhaps “responding to the horrors of war” (Ure-Smith, 2011). The focus work, created decades later, has instead a strength, a monumentality. It seems to me anchored, and reminds me of Maillol’s mountainous figure (see 13-Jun-2014). However transplanted to Sydney, on a flat grassy area just before the slope to the harbour, I can’t claim that Moore’s figure is reflected in its landscape.

Moore had a close and loving relationship with his mother. One could read into the long line of the backbone in the focus work a trace from Moore’s rubbing of his mother’s back after a long hard day of work. The control and power of the work, a sense of gravity and stability, could refer to their relationship. I don’t believe this Reclining Figure can be included in the “images of anxiety” seen in some works (McAvera, 2001), but neither is the work “almost entirely lacking in any interior or psychological life” (ibid) – that deliberate, directed gaze is too suggestive of volition.

Good art, Moore asserted, contains elements both abstract and surrealist, classical and romantic: “Order and surprise, intellect and imagination, conscious and unconscious. Both sides of the artist’s personality must play their part.” (National Gallery of Art Washington, 2001). Reclining figure: Angles supports a wide variety of readings, some quite contradictory, and I believe is the richer for it.

I’d like to look briefly at another work by Moore I have seen in the past year – Hill Arches. This work more clearly displays a metamorphosis, an ambiguity. Is it the bones of animals or some kind of insect? In my eyes it is an erotic work full of sexual energy and activity (see 15-Dec-2013). Forms have been hollowed out, flesh stripped away, forms within forms laid bare. However it is the varied presentation of the work which I will discuss here.
Henry Moore

*Hill arches*

1973 Bronze

National Gallery of Australia


There are multiple versions of this work. The maquette shows a wider spacing of the elements, losing drama and tension (see http://catalogue.henry-moore.org:8080/emuseum/view/objects/asitem/search@/0/invno-asc?t:state:flow=86105d9a-265b-4eaf-b523-b035b3fb633, or if that link isn’t good search for Object Number: LH 634 cast 0). The working model (Object Number: LH 635 cast 0) is tightened up considerably.

The version pictured above is in a corner of the National Gallery of Australia sculpture garden in Canberra and is no.4 from an edition of 4. The work is in a little hollow, heavily shaded by trees, next to a rush-filled pond. The pond itself contains Dadang Christanto’s *Heads from the North* and in one of my photographs of Christanto’s work you can see Moore’s in the distance. *Hill Arches* doesn’t dominate space, it isn’t really framed by its environment. Instead I came across this work with a sense of discovery. The work almost blends in to the gardens, the large structure dwarfed by the trees, the colour melding with the natural surrounds.

My interpretation of the sculpture as a copulating couple was based on the angle at which I first saw it, but perhaps also by the rather out-of-the-way positioning and the sense of almost surprising the work in its private space.

I found some photographs from circa. 1985, 1990 and 1995 https://artserve.anu.edu.au/raid1/student_projects/garden/hill/hill.html. Landscaping of the sculpture gardens began in 1981 and most of the sculptures were installed in 1982 (see Piekains, 2003). In those earlier years the Moore sculpture was much more prominent, although even by 1995 it could be said “over the years, as the trees have grown, the work has appeared to sink a little into the landscape” (Hyden, 1995). The work in 2014 seems to have settled in still more, and with the increasing density of reeds in the pond it is not quite so accurate to claim “the Henry Moore sits in languid repose by the edge of the Marsh Pond, the lustrous bronze surface intentionally played off against the surface of the pond” (Piekains, 2003).

The situation of the sculpture seemed to have a strong influence on my experience of it, so I spent some time tracking down the other works in the edition.

One version is in Karlsplatz, Vienna, Austria. The shot from the right is from Google Earth, and shows the work in a very formal setting to one side of an oval pool (I couldn’t even find the Canberra version, hidden in the trees on Google Earth). Photographs I found taken from various angles look completely different, influenced by the architecture of the different buildings behind – for examples see:

- http://www.aviewoncities.com/gallery/showpicture.htm?key=kveat0636

In the second photograph listed above the Moore work is a wonderful counterpoint to the baroque church behind, while in the third photograph it seems to float in the water like a strange ark.

The Headquarters, designed by Eero Saarinen, were the first known use of COR-TEN® steel in the architectural world. They have won multiple awards for architecture and the landscape design by Sasaki (see http://www.sasaki.com/project/177/deere-company-corporate-headquarters/). The rounded lines of Hill Arches are a beautiful complement to the low rectangular buildings, sculpture and buildings both proudly displaying their metal skeletons.

The final work of the Edition is owned by the Henry Moore Foundation and has traveled widely over the years. Photographs I’ve found include:

- In Kew Gardens, 2008
  http://www.barrywelchphotography.com/keyword/henry%20moore%20hill%20arches/i-44MfSHn
- New York Botanical Garden, 2008
  Their blog http://mooreinamerica.blogspot.com.au/ contains many interesting photos, including loading onto transport (January 2010) and lit at night (15-May-2009)
  http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_14282979
- Hatfield House, 2011.
  http://takeonlymemories.wordpress.com/2011/05/02/henry-moore-hill-arches/
- Perry Green, 2012

The different versions are different. For example the Canberra version is bronze in colour, unlike the green/turquoise patina of the Henry Moore Foundation work. They are presented in very different environments – Austrian urban, Australian bush garden, American industrial park, and a wide variety of temporary homes including both formal and informal gardens. The website of the Henry Moore Foundation suggests “Moore conceived [Hill Arches] for the top of a low hill but usually sited on grass, or in water, where its reflection produced an effect he particularly liked” (Henry Moore Foundation, [n.d.]). The very title of the work suggests landscape, but Cohen has claimed of the Vienna cast “losing all pretence to landscape, its curvaceous forms come to relate to the ornate dome and the twisting triumphal columns that flank the façade. Ironically, this sculpture conceived in terms of landscape has settled effortlessly into this most urbane of settings” (Cohen, 1998). In Atlanta “The turquoise Hill Arches float on a cloud of white Euphorbia “Diamond Frost” with a rose peaking through the background. I’ve eavesdropped on our visitors, and they are enamored with this piece and the lovely, delicate white flowers that set it off” (Atlanta Botanical Garden, 2009)

Richardson (2007) wrote: “the sculptor commented in 1951, just as he was beginning to contemplate making works specifically for landscapes: ‘Sculpture gains by finding a setting that suits its mood and when that happens there is gain for both the sculpture and setting’”. Does it matter that the artist had one intention, and that I don’t think a single one of the photographs I found had the work sited according to that intention? Obviously many people have enjoyed the works as presented. Does this indicate a strong sculpture that can hold its own and contribute to almost any environment? Does it reflect the cachet of such a well known artist? Could it bring still more to the viewer if seen its intended setting? It is probably only a minority of artworks that are designed for a particular site and are seen only in that site. It has been an interesting exercise to trace the different variants of Hill Arches.

Finally, I’m always happy to find a textile link. Go to http://magsramsay.blogspot.com.au/2011/09/light-and-shadow-indigo-hill-arches.html to see a
Synthetic fibres are man-made fibres that derived from chemical resources (Achwal 1984). Synthetic fibres are continuous filament form during fibre extrusion process at the stage of manufacturing either dry or wet or melt spinning methods, which means the fibres come in long lengths. Synthetic fibres are manufactured using plant materials and minerals: viscose comes from pine trees or petrochemicals, while acrylic, nylon and polyester come from oil and coal. There are various types of nerve fibres (axons) whose free endings form nociceptors. These fibres all connect peripheral organs to the spinal cord, but differ greatly both in diameter and in the thickness of the myelin sheath that surrounds them. Using these two criteria, the following types of sensory fibres can be distinguished.