

NUMINOUS

THE
LANDSCAPE
PAINTINGS OF

WILLIAM ROBINSON



EDUCATION RESOURCE

William ROBINSON *Sunset, flying fox and beyond* 1992, oil on linen. QUT Art Collection. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by William Robinson 2017.

Introduction

Over a remarkable six-decade career, William Robinson (b. 1936, Brisbane) has continually pushed the boundaries of the painting medium, driven by an inherent desire to subvert the two-dimensional picture plane. Nowhere is this more evident than in his landscapes from the 1990s through 2000s, which transcend mere visual representation, and invite visitors into a majestic and monumental dialogue with nature.

Numinous presents some of the most significant works of Robinson's oeuvre, which capture a sense of the unknown, the infinite and the divine.

These paintings reflect the multifaceted and ever-changing natural world, delving into the liminal spaces where night turns to day, earth to sky and sky to water. The artist's dynamic portrayal of natural elements—fire, water, clouds—creates a complex sense of time and space. These depictions can be interpreted as symbols for various states of mind, the cycle of life and death, or what might exist beyond the physical realm. Serving as personal expressions of his profound connection to the landscape,

Robinson's paintings open a field of vision through which to contemplate our place in the universe.

Marking fifteen years since the inception of the William Robinson Gallery at QUT in 2009, *Numinous* celebrates Robinson's significant and distinct impact on the Australian landscape tradition. A meditation space within the gallery provides a tranquil environment for quiet reflection, surrounded by the artist's radiant watercolour studies from the 1970s and 1980s, depicting sunlit landscapes and heavenly night skies. *Numinous* invites visitors to become immersed in Robinson's awe-inspiring landscapes and connect with the sublime power of nature.

The William Robinson Gallery honours the life and work of distinguished contemporary Australian artist and QUT alumnus William Robinson. Since opening in 2009, the gallery has presented annual exhibitions drawn from the QUT Art Collection, supported by works borrowed from Australian public and private collections. It is unique in being dedicated to the work of a single living, practising artist, yet managed independently of them.

Born in Brisbane in 1936, William Robinson is a celebrated Australian artist renowned for his large landscape paintings. After graduating in 1962 from Brisbane's Central Technical College, an early forerunner of QUT's Gardens Point campus, he began a long and distinguished career teaching art at several of the university's predecessor institutions. Robinson left teaching in 1989 to work full-time as an artist and since then his work has achieved national prominence.

With the award of two of Australia's most prestigious art prizes—the Archibald Prize for portraiture in 1987 and 1995, and the Wynne Prize for landscape in 1990 and 1996—Robinson's career as an artist flourished.

IMAGE: Louis Lim.



His extensive links with QUT as a student and senior arts educator were augmented by the award of an honorary doctorate from the university in 1998. In 2007, the artist was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for his outstanding achievement and service to the arts.

Robinson is critically acclaimed for his striking compositions of the Southeast Queensland rainforests and seascapes of Northern New South Wales. His work has changed the way we perceive the landscape through his distinctive, multi-viewpoint perspective. Robinson's work is represented in all major Australian public art museums as well as in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Vatican Museums, Vatican City, and the British Museum, London. With more than 320 artworks by William Robinson, QUT possesses the largest public collection of the artist's work. Holdings include paintings, sculpture, prints, drawings and ceramics spanning from the mid-1960s to today.

WATCH

QUT Galleries and Museums have produced several short films about William Robinson watch these and hear directly from the artist [here](#).



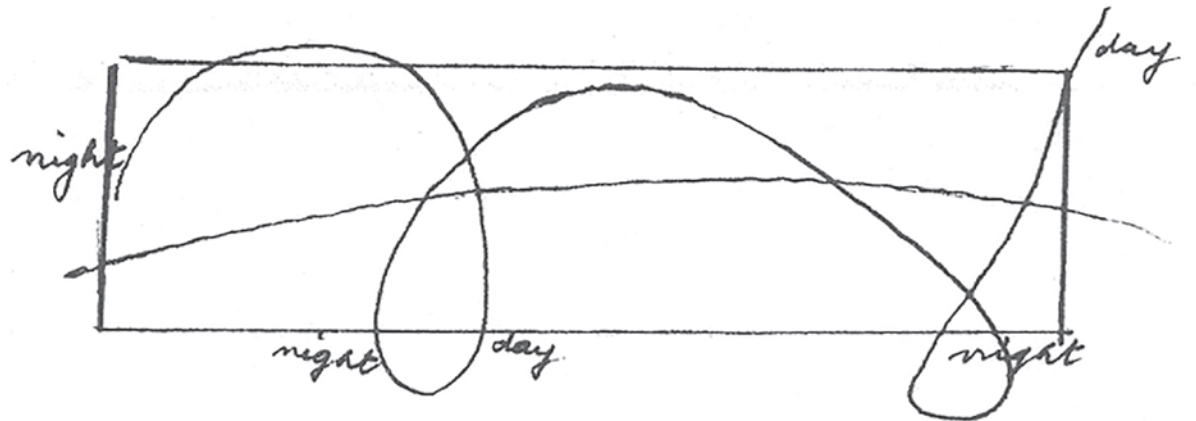
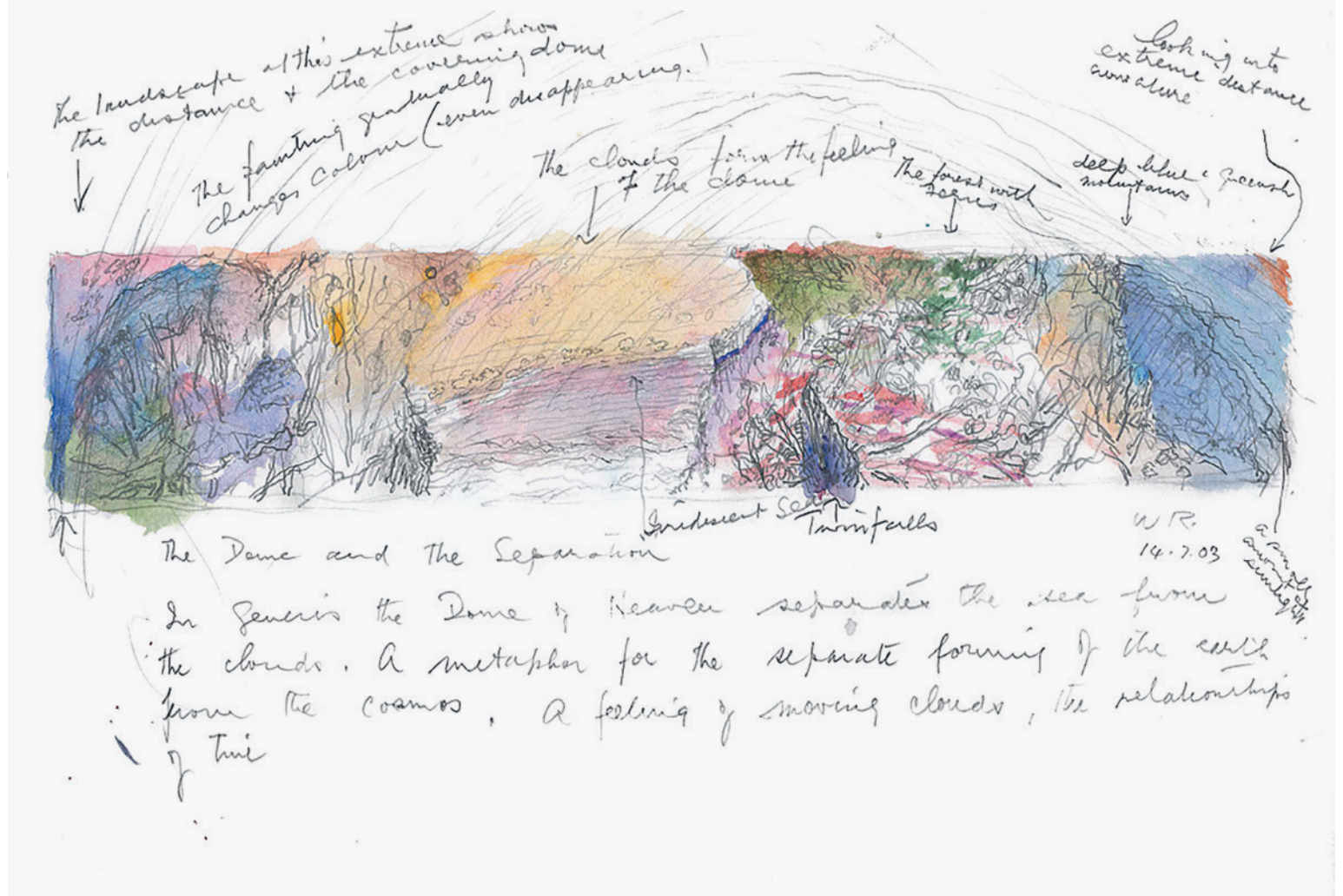


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IMAGES RIGHT, BELOW AND PREVIOUS PAGE: Watercolour studies and notes from Robinson's sketchbook showing the planning process and ideas behind *Creation landscape: The dome of space and time*.



LISTEN



LISTEN to William's description of his monumental three panel work, *Creation landscape: The dome of space and time 2003/04* [here](#).

In Genesis 1:6 it states that a dome was formed to separate Heaven and Earth. I have taken the idea of this dome and its symbolic development in Byzantium as a Golden Dome.

I have endeavoured to show the revolution of the earth through space and time. In order to achieve this I wanted to include the observer both inside and outside the picture.

The picture implies an ongoing existence apart from what is seen, i.e. the twists of the Earth can be implied outside the painting from what is seen inside the frame.

I have used the subject of Springbrook. In the central part of the work the golden dome covers an iridescent sea. A band of pink signifies the horizon and the space between the dome and the sea. This horizon is carried throughout the whole of the work and follows the natural curve of all the parts. The construction of the painting implies a helix-like twisting of space.

The morning sky in the centre is part of the dome which is also implied moving into the other separations of sky and sea. To the left of the centre Tallanbana area with twin falls and fern forest, we move to Purlingbrook Falls and flame trees, then we plunge down the drier slopes to the west with gums to Numbinah with the Nerang River. As we move further to the left, a drier bushfire landscape appears. As we move up the Nerang River towards Bechmont, Egg Rock is seen.

The movement to the right across the sea to Mt Warning then moves to night at the horizon right where the earth twists and returns to day at the top right.

The whole construction of my painting is a development which began in 1985, e.g. 'Pee wee landscape' (held in the collection of the University of Queensland). I was searching for ways to include the observer in the landscape. This landscape developed from a static image into one that showed the time of day, the seasons, movement of clouds and ways of showing what is above, behind and in front simultaneously like the many images we take in at once when we are walking in the landscape.

I became interested in the world moving through space and revolving. The observer is in the landscape that includes all of these though is not an outside observer looking into static space. I believe the work may be more in the Eastern Tradition of Japanese and Chinese landscape, although I have no direct conscious influence; but sometimes in looking at these works I can see the possibilities of the same intent.

The outside world reaches the edges of the painting and is drawn into its reality. There is a dialogue between the work existing in the frame and the possibility of existence outside.

— William Robinson

Exploring and Responding



In the seventh and final painting of Robinson's 'Creation' series, produced from 1988 to 2004, the artist addresses the narrative of creation as told in the first book of the Old Testament, Genesis, in the Bible. In the biblical story, the dome refers to the expanse that separates the waters below (the oceans, seas, and waters on Earth) from the waters above (the sky, rain, galaxies, sun, moon, stars and planets).

This awesome three-panel work captures the landscape through unique perspectives capturing multiple times of the day and night simultaneously. Robinson takes us on a journey, of walking through the landscape, looking up at the canopy and skies, down at the bush scrub and far out across the mountain ranges. From panel to panel,

left-to-right, together the constellation of skies depicts sunrise, bright daylight, sunset and the starry night.

In 1984 William moved with his family to 80-hectare farm at Beechmont in Queensland's Gold Coast hinterland and begins to paint the landscape of this subtropical rainforest area. William and his wife Shirley loved taking walks in the neighbouring rainforests together during this time, studying and soaking up the natural surroundings, flora and fauna. William would often return to his studio and paint from memory, developing work that explored multiple perspectives like the kind he experienced whilst walking within the landscape.

William ROBINSON *Creation landscape: The dome of space and time* 2003/04, oil on linen. QUT Art Collection. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by William Robinson, 2014.

WALK LOOK LISTEN

TAKE A WALK in nature. It may be near your home, at school, or in a nearby parkland.

LOOK up and down and from side to side.

Lie down on the ground and enjoy a new viewpoint and perspective.

When you return to home or school try drawing the landscape and the path you travelled through it from memory.

LISTEN to the following playlist curated by William and his good friend Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO as you create your drawing from memory.
Spotify link: [Lyrical Landscapes: The Art of William Robinson - playlist by Ra | Spotify](#)



SHARE your drawing with a friend. Describe the sights, smells and sounds you encountered whilst in the landscape you have now created in reflection.

IMAGINE taking the same walk at a different time of day and night or in another season, what may change in your depiction?

Curriculum Links

Questioning and Researching: HASS F-6 collect, sort and record information and data from observations and from provided sources, including unscaled timelines and labelled maps or models (AC9HS1S02)

Reflect on the way they and other visual artists respond to influences to inspire, develop and resolve choices they make in their own visual arts practice (AC9AVA10D02)

Evaluating and Reflecting draw conclusions based on the analysis of the data and information (AC9HG7S04)

Intercultural Understanding Identify connections between [Language] language, culture, Country/Place and identity (AC9L2F4U05)

Interpreting, Analysing and Evaluating share a perspective on information, such as stories about significant events and special places (AC9HSFS03)

How places change and how they can be cared for by different groups including First Nations Australians. (AC9HS1K04)

Observing changes in natural, managed and constructed features in their place; for example, recent erosion, revegetated areas, planted crops or new buildings (AC9HS1K04)

Understanding: Science investigate the physical conditions of a habitat and analyse how the growth and survival of living things is affected by changing physical conditions (AC9S6U01)

MEET THE WORK



PREVIOUS PAGE:

William ROBINSON *Passing storm, late afternoon, Beechmont* 1993, oil on linen. QUT Art Collection. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by William Robinson 2017.

Regarded by the artist as some of his most significant works, this work is one of five paintings that form the 'Mountain' series, marking a pivotal shift in Robinson's artistic journey, following the tragic loss of two of his children. A powerful departure from the light-hearted depictions of the Beechmont area painted by the artist in the late 1980s, these paintings evolved into the grand, deeply spiritual landscapes that defined his work throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Unlike his earlier works—in which the artist frequently painted himself and his late wife, Shirley, joyfully wandering through out

the bush—there is a notable absence of figures, leading to a more reflective and sombre portrayal of the natural world. This change is emphasised through a muted colour palette, which captures cloudy sunsets and the shadowed contours of volcanic mountain ranges. During this difficult time in his life, painting the landscape became a source of solace for Robinson—a means of connecting with the sacred and oft times, healing aspects of nature.

Exploring and Responding and Creating and Making

The spiritual significance of Country to First Nations peoples refers to the lands, waters and skies to which they are connected to and care for through family ties. *Numinous* features ancestral lands belonging to the Kombumerri families of the Yugambah Language region and ancient rainforest in Springbrook National Park that is part of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area.

QUT acknowledges the Turrbal and Yugara, as the First Nations owners of the lands where QUT now stands. We pay respect to their Elders, lore, customs and creation spirits. We recognise that these lands have always been places of teaching, research and learning.

COLLECT

Using the links provided below **RESEARCH** the exceptional ecological features of this area and the deep cultural significance of Country to the First Nations peoples of the area.

COLLECT information on this unique ecosystem and consider the potential threats facing this environment today.

- 🔗 [Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area \(Qld Section\) | Environment | Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation, Queensland](#)
- 🔗 [Numinbah Valley Environmental Education Centre](#)
- 🔗 [What Is Country? | Common Ground](#)

Use the AIATSIS map found **here**: [Map of Indigenous Australia | AIATSIS corporate website](#) to identify the Country these rainforests are found on.

This map of Indigenous Australia shows general locations of larger groupings of people which may include clans, dialects, or individual languages in a group.



William ROBINSON *Evening bushfire* 2004, oil on linen. Private collection, Brisbane.

For William Robinson, the landscape is a living organism deserving of respect and care. His profound connection to the land, particularly his property on the Darlington Range at Beechmont, made him acutely aware of how human decisions impact the natural world. His paintings

encourage viewers to reflect on their choices and environmental impact. The artwork captures not only a thriving forest but also the damaged and dead trees besieged by fire, illustrating the cycle of life and death, destruction and rebirth.

Exploring and Responding

EXPLORE how environments are used and managed, such as the practices and laws that aim to manage human impact, the use of zoning to manage local environments, creation of wildlife corridors and national parks. Consider Indigenous land management practices as explored by the Firesticks Alliance [here](#).

EXAMINE how changes due to environmental practices create issues, such as water shortages and increased floods and bushfires, the impact of issues on places and communities, research how people can mitigate the impacts, for example through building codes, zoning, firebreaks and controlled burns, and efficient irrigation.

CREATE a presentation using Sway or PowerPoint to share your findings with the class.

Curriculum Links

Knowledge and Understanding: HASS, Geography and Cross-curriculum priorities

Learning about roles and responsibilities in caring for Country/Place and how this connects with the importance of preserving cultural heritage (AC9L1F4U05)

Locate, collect and organise information and data from primary and secondary sources in a range of formats (AC9HS6S02)

The environmental world views of people and their implications for environmental management (AC9HG10K02)

create descriptions, explanations and responses, using geographical knowledge and methods, concepts, terms and reference sources (AC9HG8S06)

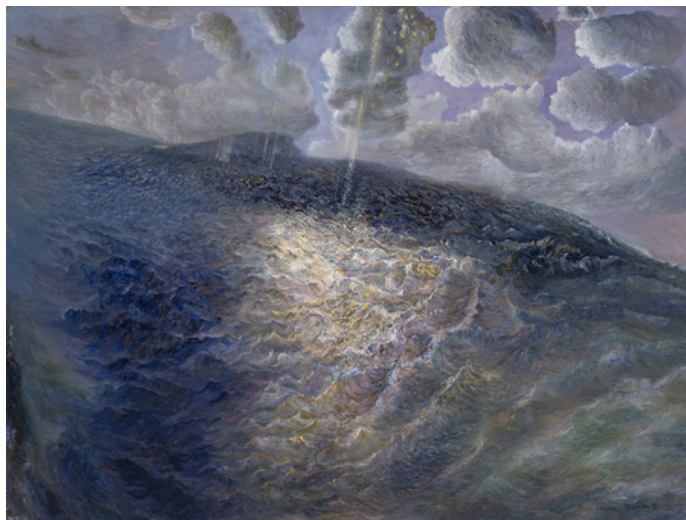
The importance of Country/Place to First Nations Australians and the Country/Place on which the school is located (AC9HSFK04)

The management of Australian environments, including managing severe weather events such as bushfires, floods, droughts or cyclones, and their consequences (AC9HS5K05)

Exploring the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Map of Indigenous Australia and identifying language names that inform relationships to Country/Place (AC9E8LA01)

Understanding: Science

Investigate the physical conditions of a habitat and analyse how the growth and survival of living things is affected by changing physical conditions (AC9S6U01)



The juncture of Queensland and New South Wales presents a unique feature in the Australian landscape: a fusion of mountain and sea, bound by ancient rainforests and cascading hills. Robinson's interpretation of this hinterland captures a world without boundaries—where sea, mountain, and sky converge in a continuous, spherical harmony. Robinson extends this interconnected vision to his seascapes, presenting the ocean as an eternal force, its vast energy enveloping the Earth in an embrace that flows seamlessly over the planet's curvature.

In 1994 William moves to Kingscliff on the northern New South Wales coast, where the changing moods of the sea and sky become a primary inspirational focus for his work.

In this study the artist conveys a strong sense of the monumentality of the surrounding Pacific Ocean on the eastern coast of Australia. Here the experience is akin to the awe and wonder we experience when immersed in nature.

William ROBINSON *Study for Creation landscape: Earth and sea* 1995, oil on linen, triptych. QUT Art Collection. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by William Robinson, 2015

Exploring and Responding

CONDUCT SOME FIELD RESEARCH by walking through a forest or similar powerful landscape. Record the sounds, smells and other sensations using a range of art materials including multi-media.

DESIGN an immersive installation that conveys your experience of being deep within the landscape. Consider sound, lighting, tactility, smell, and opportunities for the audience to experience your work from multiple perspectives.

DEVELOP an artist's statement and didactic panel to accompany your installation. Your text may also refer to musical and sonic references, poetry or narration written by other artists. Consider your audience. Produce an artwork label for children to accompany your work.

William Robinson's paintings often feature a unique multiperspective view of the landscape. This enabled him to create a sense of scale.

RESEARCH how other artists from different social, cultural, and historical contexts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists convey scale and perspective through painting.

Curriculum Links

Analysing the ways that artists represent subject matter and ideas in their artworks when developing ideas for their own representations (AC9AVA8E01)

Curate and present examples of their visual arts practice to accompany exhibits of their artworks to communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning to audiences (AC9AVA8P01)

Select and manipulate visual conventions, visual arts processes and/or materials to create artworks that reflect personal expression, and represent and/or challenge, ideas, perspectives and/or meaning (AC9AVA10C02)

Investigate ways that visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials are manipulated to represent ideas, perspectives and/or meaning in artworks created across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts (AC9AVA8E01)

Select and present documentation of visual arts practice, and display artworks in informal and/or formal settings (AC9AVA6P01)



William ROBINSON *The sunshine painting III* 1989, watercolour on paper. QUT Art Collection. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by William Robinson 2018

Typical of Robinson's work, this vibrant image goes beyond the expected reality of a landscape. From the multi-perspective composition to the lyrical use of colour, Robinson captures the essence of the landscape without directly re-presenting it to the viewer. We can see the glowing orange sun peeking out from behind the clouds

reflected in the water in the middle of the piece, while patches of sky appear at both the top and the bottom of the painting. The unconventional perspective allows us to simultaneously observe the landscape from above and below, transcending depiction and immersing us in the scene.

Exploring and Responding

LISTEN



LISTEN to the audio description of this work, co designed by accessibility consultants Sarah Empey and Jack Fitzwalter [here](#).

DISCUSS

The artist writes, "My landscapes are not a reflection of the natural world but a search for what lies beyond."

What do you think William means by this statement?

DISCUSS how you believe the artist conveys a sense of mystery or wonder for the natural world in his landscapes with a classmate.

Creating and Making

In this watercolour you can see the way the artist is exploring the effects of light and experimentation within the composition of the work –combining multiple viewpoints in a single work to convey the sense of the landscape all around us.

GATHER together the following materials for a making activity:
2 pieces of A4 paper, coloured pencils and markers, a glue stick and scissors.

SELECT three different coloured pencils to work with.

Place the first piece of paper on the table and begin looking closely at *The sunshine painting III*.

IMAGINE going for a walk through this landscape and as you look, let your first pencil trace a path through this place on the paper, keeping your focus on the painting.

Now choose a different colour and imagine you're an ant. Where can you go? Let your pencil wander across the paper.

For your third drawing imagine you are a bird. Your pencil is now swooping and flying through the landscape. Think about the movements and behaviour of a bird. Now place your paper with your three coloured journeys to one side.

FOLD your second piece of paper in half for part two of the activity.

PLACE a dot in the middle of the paper and draw a line out towards the edge to make segments, 4 triangles in total.

FILL the first section with a sunny sky, fill the second segment with a night sky, in the third section draw vegetation, plants that grow on the ground and climb in the trees, perhaps add some insects. In the final section draw the rainforest canopy, the tall trunks and branches of trees stretching towards the light above.

Now let's put our two drawings together.

CUT strips, along the long edge of your drawing, they can be even, irregular, straight or curved.

ARRANGE them across your walking drawing.

When you have spent some time doing this and are happy with your arrangement you can stick them into place.

SHARE your new artwork with a friend concentrating on each other's use of the elements of art, line, shape, form, colour, value, texture and space. Take a virtual tour of the exhibition here and consider how William employs these elements consistently in his practice to create effective compositions and to communicate his vision.

DISCUSS

How successful have you been in recreating the sensation of walking through the rainforest, the wet leaf litter underfoot and the tall canopy of trees and sky stretching out above.

What emotions, sounds and smells will you encounter in these new landscapes you have created?

DISCUSS.

Further Resources

[The William Robinson Gallery](#) is located upstairs in Old Government House.

Check out the Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) elaborations produced by Indigenous curriculum specialist Fiona Hornung [here](#).

[F-10 Curriculum | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures](#)

www.narragunnawali.org.au/

www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXb5b9pdx20

Curriculum Links

Use visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials to plan and create artworks that communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning (AC9AVA6C01)

Reflect on the ways that they and other artists respond to influences to inform choices they make in their own visual arts practice (AC9AVA8D02)

Investigate ways that visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials are manipulated to represent ideas, perspectives and/or meaning in artworks created across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts (AC9AVA8E01)



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William Robinson Gallery

www.wrgallery.qut.edu.au

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