

HOWARD ARKLEY *Riteroom*



Howard Arkley (1951–1999) was an Australian painter who was born and lived in Melbourne. He is best known for his paintings of interiors and exteriors of suburban homes, which he enlivens with dense patterning, vivid colour and airbrushed lines. Inspired by the bold colours and lines used in advertising posters and junk mail, his images are pristine with large areas of flat colour dominating his paintings. Arkley creates a sensory overload by contrasting stencilled patterns with hazy airbrushed outlines. Although these lines define shapes their blurred edges give the impression of being slightly out of focus. Before Arkley, few artists depicted suburban environments, instead representing the Australian bush, a place where very few people lived at the time. Arkley's work explores the beauty of suburban homes, transforming their identity through his brightly coloured patterns and unusual perspectives.

DID YOU KNOW?

Howard Arkley's major installation *The Home Show* was included in the 1999 Venice Biennale. Identify other Australian artists in the Gallery's collection who have also been represented in a Venice Biennale.

image: Howard Arkley, Australia, 1951–1999, *Riteroom*, 1998, Melbourne, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 203.0 x 200.0 cm; Gift of the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 1999, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. © estate of Howard Arkley, Courtesy of Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art, Melbourne

RESOURCES

BOOKS

Gregory, J. *Carnival in Suburbia: The Art of Howard Arkley*,
 Cambridge University Press, University Press, 2006

VIDEOS

Howard Arkley Interview

<http://bit.ly/2wctYti>

WEBSITES

The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia

<http://bit.ly/2wRVGZq>

National Portrait Gallery

<http://bit.ly/2vFNwow>

KEY LITERACY WORDS

Abstract

Airbrush

Australian identity

Collaboration

Landscape

Line

Pattern

Perspective

Pop Art

Stencil

Suburbia

EARLY YEARS

RESPONDING

Find all the straight and curvy lines in *Riteroom*.

What does Arkley's painting make you think of and why?

Why do you think Arkley chose these colours for this painting?

MAKING

Imagine you have stepped inside Arkley's painting. Draw an outfit you would wear when visiting *Riteroom*.

Look closely at all the patterns in *Riteroom* and *Chair*.
 Re-draw all the patterns you can see. Create three new patterns that Arkley could have used instead.

PRIMARY

RESPONDING

What is your first impression of *Riteroom*? What mood does this painting convey? What do you notice about the other works nearby?

Consider what your lounge room looks like at home. What things do you think are missing from *Riteroom*?

How many other works of art in the Gallery can you find that represent interiors? Choose one of these interiors that you would like to live in. With a friend discuss why you made your selection.

Would Howard Arkley's *Chair* be comfortable to sit on? Explain your answer.

Howard Arkley was inspired by a range of ideas and images including works by artists Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, real-estate advertisements, decorative panels on fly screens, Home Beautiful magazines, the Art Nouveau style, colours in advertising, punk and rock music as well as science, mathematics and geometry. If you were to create a work of art based on influences in your life what would be on your list?

MAKING

Arkley stated '*ordinary houses are filled with pattern – on the fireplace, on the curtains, tiles, in the carpet; and the different bricks on the different houses, then you have the lawn, the house the tiles, then you have the beautiful sky – it's rich*'. Photograph all the patterns that exist in your home. Using these images create a collage.

Arkley thought the airbrush was an interesting tool because he could make marks without touching the canvas. Using a range of objects experiment with making marks without allowing your implement to touch the surface.

Draw the person who might live in the home of *Riteroom*. What would they look like? What would they wear? Write a short story to describe who this person is.

Design a table to accompany Arkley's *Chair*.

Arkley would often use objects such as perforated laundry baskets and flyscreens as ready-made stencils. Collect a variety of everyday objects that could be used as temporary stencils such as nets, doilies and fabrics. Create a repeated pattern using these makeshift stencils.

Arkley's paintings celebrate the Australian home of a particular era. His use of vivid colours and patterns draw the viewer's attention to a mundane scene and encourage us to look at these environments in a new way. Using a photograph of your school or classroom, re-draw the basic shapes of the buildings or objects. Fill these shapes with elaborate and contrasting patterns, line and colour, to transform your everyday environment.

THINK & DISCUSS

Assign a soundtrack to *Riteroom*. What type of music would you select and why?



image: Howard Arkley, Australia, 1951–1999, *Chair*, 1991, Oakleigh, Melbourne, synthetic polymer paint and vinyl on wood, 86.5 x 38.0 x 40.0 cm (chair), 1.0 x 64.5 x 61.5 cm (base); Gift of Patrick Corrigan AM through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2015. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

SECONDARY

RESPONDING

Many earlier artists depicted the Australian landscape, yet few responded to the urban or suburban landscape. Arkley noted that the rural experience was not something he was familiar with and instead focussed on suburbia where most people in Australia lived. Investigate the works of John Brack and Ian Strange. Compare their ideas of suburbia to that of Arkley's.

'Works of art by John Brack and Howard Arkley attempt to re-define their environment; challenging previous ideas about the Australian landscape.' Discuss this statement with reference to works of art to support your argument.

Research interior design trends from the 1940s onward. Describe how interior design has changed in Australia. Select one element or point in time where a shift in Australian design occurred. What influenced this shift?

At some point in their careers all artists are influenced by others. At an early age, contemporary artist Reko Rennie was inspired by Howard Arkley. Compare both artists' works in terms of their formal qualities and concepts. Look at other works of art near Arkley's installation. What connections can you identify between them?

Howard Arkley worked closely with artists Jon Cattapan, Robert Rooney and Jenny Watson. Select a work of art by each artist. What similarities do they share?

During his career Howard Arkley collaborated with Juan Davila, whose work *TOD* is also in the Gallery's collection. Both artists showed work in the 1981 exhibition 'Popism' at the National Gallery of Victoria. Many artists in this exhibition presented a new type of Australian contemporary art, one that tackled ideas about Australian identity, a result of being influenced by international artists. What Australian stories are being told in the work by Davila and Arkley? Select another Australian work of art on display and compare it to Arkley and Davila. Discuss which work of art is more successful in depicting Australia's identity.

MAKING

Author of *Carnival in Suburbia: the art of Howard Arkley*, John Gregory, stated: *Howard Arkley transformed our vision of suburbia – much as Fred Williams' scrubby marks and long horizon lines made us see the Australian landscape afresh.* Arkley wanted to change the way people saw the suburbs. Create a work of art that encourages people to look at the place you live in a different way.

Howard Arkley celebrated the banality of everyday living. Create a small sculpture based on your environment and things you see every day. Transform something you consider ordinary into something extraordinary.

Look closely at *Chair* by Howard Arkley and compare it to others in the collection. Which is the most aesthetically pleasing and which would be the most functional? Considering form and function, design your own chair, inspired by those in the collection.

Arkley was inspired by popular culture such as advertising posters, magazines and products found in the supermarket. Photograph a room in your home. Using Photoshop, simplify your image by outlining its basic shapes. Re-invigorate this image by filling the shapes with colours and patterns sourced from products you might purchase at the supermarket.



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