

Start at home

George Cooley

ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA



I can only capture the nearest colours
that are there in my imagination

– George Cooley

About the Artist

George Cooley lives and works in Coober Pedy, approximately 850 kilometres northwest of Adelaide. Cooley is a painter and opal miner. He spent his childhood years traversing, camping, hunting, prospecting (mining) and learning cultural knowledge of the area.

Did you know?

Opals are multi-coloured gems that consist of spheres of silica arranged in patterns and Coober Pedy has one of the largest opal deposits in the world.

About the work

Coober Pedy is the subject of Cooley's paintings, particularly the Kanku-Breakaways, a geological formation at the edge of the town that dramatically rises up from the surrounding desert opal fields. He first visited this place with his father—also an opal miner—in 1958. Although Cooley is not a traditional custodian of the Kanku-Breakaways, his paintings show a deep love and close observation of area.

The sweeping gestural marks in Cooley's paintings *Moving Back to Country* (2022) and *The Breakaways* (2023) capture an opalescent spectrum of colours in both the ground itself and the landscape as a living site.



The Activity

Create your own Opalescent Painting

As an opal prospector, Cooley has experienced the Coober Pedy landscape from high above and deep below, with the layers of earth beneath the surface revealing iridescent flashes of colours held within the precious gem.

- 1 Think of the vivid colours that remind you of a place. Is it your garden after the rain or sun setting over the sea or sun rising over the hills?
- 2 Select three colours associated with a memorable place.
- 3 Colour your surface with oil pastels.
- 4 Cover your colours with a layer of black paint.
- 5 Once dry, scratch the surface by drawing your memory of this place to reveal the spectrum of colours that lie beneath.

Materials

- Oil pastels or crayons
- Black paint
- Cartridge paper
- Hairdryer (if you can't wait for the paint to dry naturally)
- Skewer

Take it Further

Cooley has said that he has tried to capture the colour of the scenery of Coober Pedy as it changes during sunrise and sunset.

- Look outside your house at sunrise and/or sunset.
- Photograph this scene for one week at the same time each day. You might wait for 15–30min, taking additional photos, observing how the light and colour changes.
- Compare how your images changed from day to day? Edit and manipulate the saturation of your photographs to emphasise the colour.
- Select two images to use as reference for two large paintings. Pay close attention to capturing the contrasting colours between the sky and the ground.

Still want more...

See our George Cooley Education Resource available online to hear George's songs about Country.



My Painted Country 1, is currently on display in the vestibule as part of the 18th Biennial of Australian Art: Inner Sanctum

detail George Cooley, born Yanyuwa Country, Borroloola, Northern Territory 1953, *My Painted Country 1*, 2023, synthetic polymer paint on board, two parts: 280.0 × 240.0 cm, one part: 360.0 × 240.0 cm; Courtesy of the artist and Umoona Community Arts Centre, South Australia © George Cooley

We would love to see your work! Ask your parent or carer to post a photo on Instagram and tag the Art Gallery of South Australia. Or you can email your photo to us at public.programs@artgallery.sa.gov.au

@agsa.adelaide #agsastart