Celebrating Townsville

EDUCATION RESOURCE

Hervey’s Range [detail] by James Brown 1992, JCU Art Collection
ARTIST: RON MCBURNIE  
ARTWORK: A Rake’s Progress – Sale of the Century I and II

The artist made this diptych (of two related etchings) to be part of a series which was titled “A Rake’s Progress”. The series was loosely based on an earlier series of paintings and engravings by the great English artist William Hogarth (1697-1764).

Hogarth’s Rake’s Progress was made initially as a series of paintings which the artist popularised in an edition of prints (made using the etching and engraving process). Hogarth’s series followed the descent of young Tom Rakewell after he inherited and squandered the wealth left to him by his miserly father. After a series of bad decisions including gambling, loose living etc. Tom ends his days in the Bethlehem Hospital (aka Bedlam), London’s famous mental asylum.

Ron McBurnie made his own series of images of the Rake’s Progress in which his Rake is somewhat autobiographical and follows the life of the then artist living his early life as an art student in Brisbane. Many of the images are set in Brisbane city or surrounding suburbs and depict political and social events and topical landmarks in the area. In each etching the artist, or Rake, appears sometimes hidden within the landscapes depicted.

The two Rake’s Progress etchings in the exhibition printed from zinc plate have a link to Hogarth’s last engraving of Tom Rakewell’s incarceration in the Bedlam mental asylum. A link to the image can be found in the street sign as well as the position of the dogs on the street and several other clues. Unlike Hogarth’s Rake who seems destitute, McBurnie’s Rake is still active and has hope even though raking leaves in the middle of a cyclone may be seen by some as an irrational activity. Pandemonium can be observed on the street with the burning of art books and a piano suggesting the loss of our culture. Inside the houses people watch a popular 1980’s quiz show called Sale of the century, which is symbolic of what is happening to the land just outside their door.

View images of Hogarths Rake’s progress at this website  
https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/monarchy-enlightenment/britain-18c/britain-ageof-revolution/a/hogarth-a-rakes-progress
INVESTIGATE

Sale of the century is described as an etching on paper. Find out what an etching is. From reading about the artwork, what metal has the artist used to make this etching?

Look online for an image of Hogarth’s last engraving of the Rakes Progress. Compare that work with McBurnie’s Sale of the Century.

List any similarities between the two works. Clue: Street names, dogs.

Write down why you think McBurnie called his diptych “Sale of the Century”. Does the title relate to any activities taking place within the etching? Clue: Game Show, selling something.

Locate the artist on the left side of the left panel. What activity is he involved in completing and why do you think he is doing it?

Who is the unluckiest animal in the etching?
**ARTIST:** RON MCBURNIE  
**ARTWORK:** *The Oberon Tree*

*The Oberon Tree* is a large painting made after the artist had made a smaller study drawing from life while staying in a private park in Oberon, which is at the foothills of the Blue Mountains in New South Wales. The artist’s initial study drawing referenced the strength and roughness of an ancient gnarled pine tree in the grounds of the park. The final, larger painting as shown in the exhibition took many elements from the initial study but also drew on ideas from Dutch and Flemish engravings held in the artist’s own private Print Collection.

Aegidius Sadeler and Jan van de Velde are two artists who have been a strong influence on the artist’s recent work. Their work often focused on the grandeur of landscape and the way it dwarfed the people who were travelling through it.

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Ron McBURNIE  
b.1957 Australia  
*The Oberon Tree 2010*  
Ink and watercolour on paper  
76 x 109 cm  
Collection of the artist  
Photograph: Michael Marzik

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**ABOUT THE ARTWORK**

Ron McBurnie’s study for *The Oberon Tree*, 2010  
(ink and watercolour) Photograph: Ron McBurnie

Influence on the making of *The Oberon Tree*:  
Aegidius Sadeler I (c.1555-1609) *Landscape with three men and a dog on the path above a waterfall*, engraving, on laid paper, c.1600, from the artist’s private Print Collection.  
Photograph: Ron McBurnie
The Oberon Tree takes on a sense of monumentality through the viewpoint the artist has used as well as variations of strong, warm, foreground colours to the cool background colours with their subtle variation in washes and tones in the distant hills.

How does the artist give the tree a sense of scale in this watercolour?

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Some people have noted that they have seen different things revealed within the trunk of the tree. **List** what you can see?

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**Look online** at the landscape engravings of Aegidius Sadeler and Jan van de Velde. **Describe** similarities you can find between their work and this painting?

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**PROJECT**

**Make** a painting using a limited range of colours like those used in The Oberon Tree.

Reference List:
Celebrating Townsville EDUCATION RESOURCE for secondary students

The aim of this resource is to offer insights into the works of art featured in the exhibition. It is intended as a starting point for generating ideas, for encouraging student research, and as a basis for discussion during exhibition visits. The resource provides background information on the development of particular works, and offers focus questions and suggested activities. It can be used in a variety of ways, both for student groups, and for individual study and research.

Acknowledgment: Thank-you to the artists who provided a statement about their work to assist with the development of this resource.

Umbrella Studio acknowledges the financial support of: the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland, which is part of the Department of Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts, the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments.

Townsville City Council is proud to support the “Celebrating Townsville” exhibition and supporting education programme which has been made possible through the Townsville 150 Anniversary Grant Programme.