

## SECTION 2

# SYLLABUS FOCUS

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# 1

## EARLY WORKS

... about eleven I decided, and I quite deliberately decided, that I would go into an art which I didn't have to answer to anyone; that apart from a framer, and plausibly a dealer, it would be a one-man band.

BRETT WHITELEY in Pearce 1995, p 15

Brett Whiteley was born in Sydney on 7 April 1939. He lived in the northern suburb of Longueville and attended Chatswood Primary School, then Scots College in Bathurst. After leaving school in 1956 at the age of 17, Whiteley worked in Sydney for the advertising agency Lintas. Apart from attending evening drawing classes and sketch clubs, he was largely self-taught. During the next three and a half years he produced several drawings and paintings containing qualities which he carried into his later work.

His early inspiration came from a mixture of art and life experiences. There were the books and reproductions of international painters such as William Scott, Ben Shahn, Giotto, Arshile Gorky, Amedeo Modigliani, Giorgio Morandi and Pablo Picasso. Whiteley also looked at the original Australian paintings of Lloyd Rees, William Dobell, Sali Herman and especially Russell Drysdale, whose palette and landscape forms influenced him profoundly.

He was also influenced by the landscapes around him – the country towns of Hill End, Sofala and Bathurst, not to mention the streets and buildings of Sydney, where he lived and worked. Their shapes, textures and colours remained prevalent in his work, even after he left Australia for Europe at the beginning of 1960. Russell Drysdale, who awarded Whiteley an Italian travelling scholarship, recognised in Whiteley a feeling for abstraction then dominating the concerns of most young artists in Australia. Drysdale also saw in Whiteley someone who was aware of, and prepared to accommodate, the traditions of older painters such as himself.

## K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ART** Imagine walking through *Sofala*. List the local features depicted by Whiteley. What gives you this impression? What do the earthy colours in *Sofala* remind you of? Using primary colours and white only, practise mixing earthy tones. Select the colours you feel represent your local area. Use these colours as the basis for a painting.

**HSIE** Locate Sofala, Hill End and Bathurst on a map. Search the library and Internet for photographs of these towns. Compare the photographs with paintings by Russell Drysdale and Brett Whiteley. Explore the history of central-western New South Wales. Research the industries in these towns.

## 7-12 FRAMING QUESTIONS

- Consider why generations of Australian artists have been fascinated by the landscapes of central-western New South Wales. Research and compare the Sofala paintings of artists Russell Drysdale and Donald Friend. What did Whiteley gain from responding to these artists' works? What did Drysdale mean when he suggested that Whiteley was aware of, and prepared to accommodate, the traditions of older painters like himself?
- Research the artist-in-residency program currently available in Hill End for emerging artists. Write a proposal to be selected, considering the requirements for selection. Search the Internet to discover contemporary artists currently working in Hill End and study their interpretations of that environment (see [www.hillendart.com](http://www.hillendart.com)).

# 1

## EARLY WORKS

### **Sofala** 1958

oil on canvas on board, 65.5 x 85.8 cm board; 83.8 x 95.6 x 2.9 cm frame

Purchased by the NSW state government 1994, transferred to the Art Gallery of New South Wales 1998

© Whiteley Estate



# 2

## ABSTRACTION

Every painting of Whiteley's is a roll in the hay with the muse of art history: as soon as an issue about the nature of art or perception was raised by another painter – Gorky, de Kooning, Bacon, Giacometti, Rauschenberg, Johns, Warhol, Piero della Francesca, Uccello, Masaccio – Whiteley was into it, either painting his way through it or arguing it out.

ROBERT HUGHES, art critic, in Pearce 1995, p 25

Whiteley arrived in Italy at the beginning of 1960 and stayed for about ten months. Basing himself first in Rome, then Florence, he spent most of his time looking at paintings in churches and museums, developing a particular interest in late Byzantine and early Renaissance artists, for example Cimabue, Duccio, Uccello and Piero della Francesca.

During this period Whiteley made a few paintings that were derived from the goldfields landscapes he had painted in Australia but informed by the still lifes of British artist William Scott and the semi-erotic abstractions of American artist Arshile Gorky.

After moving to London, where he remained based for the next seven years, Whiteley continued to combine these elements – the earthy colours of Australia, as reflected in the paintings of Russell Drysdale, and the ambience of Italian painting and architecture – with powerful hybrid forms of landscape and the female torso. Such paintings glowed with a confident command of their visual sources while conveying an acute awareness of the current modes of abstraction. Three works shown in Bryan Robertson's exhibition of recent Australian painting at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1961 created a sensation; the Tate gallery's purchase of *Untitled red painting* 1960 establishing his international reputation. He was 22 years of age.

After Whiteley married Wendy Julius in March 1962, they spent six months in Sigean, a town in the south of France near the Spanish border. Whiteley's most elegant and relaxed abstract work emerged from his idyllic life there. He saw for the first time the creamy slopes dotted with olive trees that had attracted him to the backgrounds of paintings by Piero della Francesca, and he dispersed his shapes according to the general feeling of the Mediterranean environment. Sigean signalled a move away from both landscape and abstraction into figuration.

### K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ART** Focus on your local area, identifying key sites and landmarks. Create a bird's-eye view drawing. Simplify your aerial view into abstract shapes. Use this drawing as the basis for an abstract landscape painting.

**ENGLISH** Compose a narrative about this painting. Write a personal account of travelling the two miles to collect the letters. Describe the landscape around you. Use all your senses.

### 7-12 FRAMING QUESTIONS

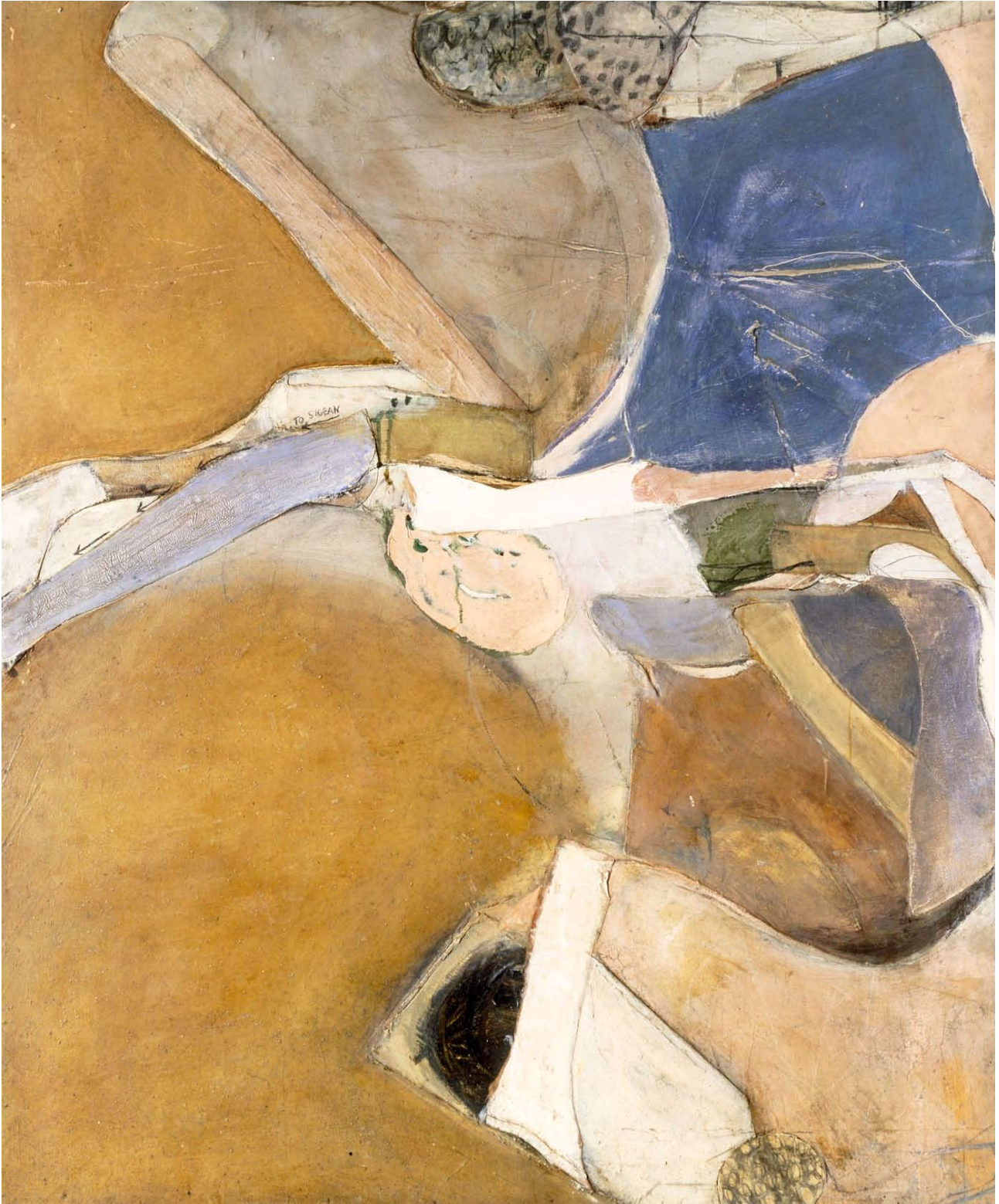
- Winning the Italian Travelling Scholarship exposed Whiteley to European artists that influenced him greatly. Consider the impact of viewing actual Byzantine and early Renaissance artworks. Notice the typically Mediterranean backgrounds. Discuss Whiteley's use of Mediterranean light and colours in his abstractions.
- Whiteley's approach to abstraction was greatly influenced by the still-life paintings of William Scott, Ben Shahn and Arshile Gorky. Find images of works by these artists. Assess how Whiteley fused these influences and outline the similarities with these artists and the differences Whiteley developed from them.



# 2

## ABSTRACTION

**Two miles to get the letters** 1962–65  
charcoal, tempera, oil and linseed oil, collage, on plywood  
122 x 101.7 cm board; 123 x 102.2 x 5 cm frame  
© Whiteley Estate



# 3

## BATHROOM SERIES

With both the Sigean abstractions and bathroom series, the colour and the flattening of the form was an acknowledgement of his love of Piero della Francesca. The actual landscape and our lifestyle was closer to Piero's time than our own century seemed ... The surrounding countryside was very much like the background to the Baptism of Christ – the creamy and dry greens with the dots.

WENDY WHITELEY in Pearce 1995, p 43

Following their stay in Sigean, the Whiteleys travelled to Spain and New York before returning to London and settling into a new studio. The last Sigean abstractions that Whiteley worked on show an increasing preoccupation with the female torso, as though seen from a distance and in multiple forms dispersed across a shallow pictorial field. He then began his bathroom series, preserving the warm reds and honey colours of his abstractions while combining them with the bathroom's acid blues and greens.

Whiteley started to focus on the single figure, the naked form of Wendy in the bath, capturing the tactility and tones of her flesh with an intimacy rarely equalled in his later paintings of the same subject. Something of the colours and broad shapes of Piero della Francesca's works was retained, but a closer tradition of figurative painting was making an impact on him, particularly through the work of Pierre Bonnard and Francis Bacon. Indeed, one of Bonnard's most striking bath paintings was at the Tate gallery and Whiteley was impressed by a reproduction of this he saw in the studio of William Scott.

Whiteley exhibited his bathroom pictures at the Marlborough New London Gallery in 1964, and one painting was purchased by the Tate gallery, the second in just a few years. Most importantly, the bathroom series signified Whiteley's breakthrough as a figure draughtsman and his desire to make eroticism more explicit.

In the catalogue to the exhibition *New generation: 1964* at the Whitechapel Gallery he wrote: 'All the paintings I have made in the last four years have been concerned one way or another with sex and the desire to record sensual behaviour.'

### K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ART** Is the figure in the painting still or moving? How has Whiteley suggested this? Can you find any straight lines? What do the lines suggest? Use mixed media and experiment to create watery effects.

**MUSIC** Compile a list of sounds that could be associated with water: running water, splashing, gurgling and the pop of bubbles from the bath. Create a musical composition to go with this Whiteley series. Find examples of music inspired by water.

### 7-12 FRAMING QUESTIONS

- Outline how Whiteley has elongated and distorted the figure of Wendy Whiteley. Use charcoal to draw a figure from various angles on the same page, overlapping the different poses. Select sections of the sketches to erase so the figure becomes distorted and movement is suggested. Display your works in class.
- Explore the genre of the nude in an interior. Investigate Pierre Bonnard's and Francis Bacon's use of interiors. Discuss the influence of Bonnard and Bacon on Whiteley during his early years in London.

# 3

## BATHROOM SERIES

**Woman in bath** 1963 (reworked 1964)

oil, paper, graphite and tempera on plywood

183.1 x 218.7 cm board; 188 x 224 x 6.3 cm frame

Purchased with funds provided by the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales 2000

© Whiteley Estate





# 4

## CHRISTIE AND LONDON ZOO SERIES

The fact that Whiteley could take a subject so loaded with journalistic associations, and turn it into art, is the measure of his power for transformation ...

ROBERT HUGHES, art critic, in Pearce 1995, p 26

When the Whiteleys arrived in London at the end of 1960, they moved to an apartment building in Ladbroke Grove, which was then a working-class district popular with other Australian and British artists. There Whiteley became fascinated with a milieu of London violence that was hidden away, festering behind closed doors.

He lived not far from Rillington Place, where the necrophile murderer John Christie had killed several women, mainly prostitutes, during the 1940s and early 50s. Posing as a doctor, Christie had lured his victims on the pretext of curing their ailments with a special balsamic inhalant. After gassing them, he ravished their bodies and hid them in the walls of his house.

The research that Whiteley did for this series of paintings and drawings, exhibited in 1965 at Marlborough New London Gallery, especially in contrast with his previous works on the bathroom theme, reflects his preoccupation with duality. Moving almost entirely away from the soft-focus ambience of abstraction, he now examined with sharp explicitness the evil side of the sexual drive within the human condition.

His artistic mentor was Francis Bacon; unlike the British painter, however, Whiteley invested his nudes with a sensuality underlining a new-found command of figure draughtsmanship. Equally significant, the Christie series was a response to his father's death in 1963 in Sydney, an event he would never adequately come to terms with.

Painted and exhibited at the same time were the London Zoo pictures. These were an essential complement to the Christie series, particularly in relation to Bacon's caged figures. Whiteley's spirited paintings and drawings of giraffes, monkeys and lions may also be appreciated in the context of his ongoing feeling of connection with the animal and bird kingdoms.

### K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ART** Collect material about a current news story. Collage images from newspapers, magazines and your own sketches to illustrate it.

**MATHS** Grid out this Whiteley image and work out the percentages of text and image.

### 7-12 FRAMING QUESTIONS

- Whiteley wanted to 'take something as bad as the human condition could get ... [and] try to define evil'.\* Do you think he was successful? Discuss.
- Assess the impact of using photographs of individuals involved and actual newspaper text in this artwork. Consider historical events recorded by Goya, Warhol and Picasso. Research one of these artists, discuss their interpretation of a specific event and compare to Whiteley's approach in the Christie series.

\* McGrath 1995, p 58



# 4

## CHRISTIE AND LONDON ZOO SERIES

Christie 1965

pen and ink, charcoal, gouache, oil, collage

78.8 x 57.3 cm sheet; 70 x 55.3 cm sight; 103.4 x 77.9 x 3.3 cm frame

© Whiteley Estate



# 5

## LAVENDER BAY

The paintings ... begin from the ... highest point of affection – points of optical ecstasy, where romanticism and optimism overshadow any form of menace or foreboding ... Almost all the works have been rendered in a lyrical and personal style where colour ... has this time been used in saturation.

BRETT WHITELEY, introduction to the exhibition *Lavender Bay series* 1974, in McGrath 1979, pp 168–70

After the birth of their daughter, Arkie, in 1964 in London, the Whiteleys visited Australia. They arrived in Sydney in the summer of 1965 and Whiteley soon began to think of Australia in terms of its geographical relationship to Asia rather than its Anglo-Celtic colonial beginnings. Two exhibitions held in 1966 coincided with their Australian stay.

They travelled back to England via Calcutta. This was later reflected in the works he exhibited in London. Whiteley was awarded a Harkness Fellowship from 1967 to 1969 to live in New York. In July 1969 Whiteley flew to Fiji, seeking the refuge of a world far removed from the chaos and stress he encountered. Wendy and Arkie followed shortly after, and for a few months he enjoyed the tranquillity he had known in Sigean seven years earlier. It was his attempt to glimpse the pure states of paradise envisaged by Baudelaire and Gauguin. Sadly, the period in Fiji was short lived and by November the Whiteley's were back in Sydney, with mixed feelings about remaining in Australia for very long.

They found a house in Lavender Bay, through friend and architect Rollin Schicht, who had been in London at the same time as the Whiteleys. Schicht was now living with his family on the upper floor. The ambience of the house, which the Whiteleys purchased a few years later, and the harbour offered a perfect vehicle for Whiteley's gift at composing works with large, empty spaces, and evoked strong feelings that at last he had come home. Inspired mainly by Matisse and particularly his masterpiece *The red studio* 1911, Whiteley focused on three main subjects during the 1970s: interiors, harbour views and table-top still lifes. Unlike the vision of Matisse however, there are small hints that all was not perfect in paradise. In several paintings, harbour glimpses are escape routes from enclosures, and there are subtle manifestations of the restlessness that became more explicit in Whiteley's portraits during this time and into the 1980s.

### K–6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ART** Use colour to represent a landscape throughout the seasons.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY** Locate Lavender Bay on a map of Sydney. List key landmarks of Sydney you can see from Lavender Bay. How is Sydney Harbour used today? Collate data and chart your results.

### 7–12 FRAMING QUESTIONS

- Consider the scale of this work and its effect on you, the viewer. Whiteley described this body of work as 'soaking in perfume'.\* What did he mean? Give examples from the painting. Compare this painting to other monochrome artworks. Wander around the harbour and absorb the sights, sounds and smells. Create your own harbour view painting based on the various landmarks and activities that occur in Sydney Harbour. Select a warm or cool colour palette for your painting.
- Research the work of 20th-century artists who used colour fields as their main element and source of personal expression. Create a series of abstract paintings, photographs or computer graphics inspired by sunset skies.

\* interview with Phillip Adam, radio 2UE Sydney, Sept 1986



# 5

## LAVENDER BAY

### **Big orange (sunset)** 1974

oil and collage on wood

244.0 x 305.0cm board; 246.0 x 307.2 x 4.8cm frame

Gift of Patrick White 1974

© Whiteley Estate



# 6

## PORTRAITS

The big self portrait looking at himself in the mirror is extraordinarily honest in some ways. He makes no attempt to hide the fact that he is somewhere else ... He was trying silently to say, Stay away, this is not what it might seem. Look at this beautiful house and wonderful pictures and things. But there was another side – that's duality of life – and that's where Brett's pictures moved away from Matisse's.

WENDY WHITELEY in Pearce 1995, p 48

After returning to Australia at the end of 1969, Whiteley produced many works which covered a spectrum of moods – from the startling imagery of *Alchemy* to the calm ecstasy of landscape and harbour views to the implied violence of his van Gogh paintings. The contrasts of moods, which often existed side-by-side in one work, reflected Whiteley's interest in duality, or the conflict of opposing states of being. He was also obsessed with ideas about schizophrenia. Whiteley followed the writings of British psychiatrist R D Laing, who created self-induced states of madness in order to analyse certain disjunctive aspects of the human condition.

From the mid 1960s therefore, many of Whiteley's portraits can be seen not so much as optical studies but as explorations of the psyche, whether his own or that of others with whom he identified. A number of self-portraits show Whiteley's image split into multiples, perhaps of himself, or of other identities. Such projections into alternative states can also be read into the face of a weeping woman, or even the birds and animals that inhabit Whiteley's landscapes.

Perhaps the first portraits in Australian art that dealt seriously with emotional or psychological archetypes were painted by Arthur Boyd and Albert Tucker in Melbourne during the 1940s. Whiteley added to this legacy in 1964 with his Christie images. In the subsequent two decades, Whiteley produced spectacular portraits of his heroes – van Gogh, Rembrandt, Gauguin, Dylan, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Bacon, focusing with particular fascination on those who had, as he perceived in himself, addictive personalities.

Whiteley won the acclaimed Archibald Prize for portraiture twice in quick succession, in 1976 with his *Self-portrait in the studio* and in 1978 with his confronting *Art, life and the other thing*.

### K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ART** Look at self-portraits in art history. Use a hand-held mirror to sketch or paint your own portrait.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY** Select objects and place yourself in your favourite room.

Take a series of digital images or draw a series of sketches of your favourite place and several items that are important to you. Scan and collage these images together to create a self-portrait to display in class.

### 7-12 FRAMING QUESTIONS

- Compare *Self-portrait in the studio* to Henri Matisse's *The red studio* of 1911. Consider how Whiteley personalised the theme of the artist and studio. According to curator Barry Pearce, 'Unlike Matisse, Whiteley never emptied his ego completely from such subjects.'\* Discuss this quote.
- How does this work challenge the conventions of self-portraiture? How does Whiteley balance both public and private aspects of his life in this painting? Locate the various artworks by Whiteley within view. List the items found in this studio. Identify elements of collage. Research why the Board of Trustees of the Art Gallery of NSW awarded Whiteley the Archibald Prize in 1976 for *Self-portrait in the studio* and in 1978 for *Art, life and the other thing*. Compare these self-portraits.

\* Pearce 1995, p 35



# 6

## PORTRAITS

### Self-portrait in the studio 1976

oil, collage, hair on canvas

200.5 x 259 cm stretcher; 210.5 x 268.5 x 5.7 cm frame

Purchased 1977

© Whiteley Estate



# 7 BIRDS

He was mad about eggs, loved their shape and symbolism ... I was almost crucified for stealing eggs from a bird's nest for Brett. His huge appreciation of nature was evident from childhood – he rejoiced in the optical look of the world and delighted in making art out of it.

FRAN HOPKIRK, Whiteley's sister, in Hawley 1993, p 40

Of all the subjects Brett Whiteley painted in his career, landscapes gave him the greatest sense of release. At school in Bathurst he set up his easel at the back of the classroom and drew views through the window. The soft hills and fields of surrounding countryside were indelibly embedded in his repertoire of images and fed his imagination over many years.

After leaving school, he explored the edges of Sydney Harbour to emulate the visions of Lloyd Rees; he travelled to Sofala and Hill End in central-western New South Wales in the path of Russell Drysdale; and from the late 1970s fell under the influence of Japanese and Chinese art and of Gauguin's painting *The yellow Christ* 1889, which reinforced his need to create landscape as a sanctuary. If in many of his other themes Whiteley confronted the difficult questions of his psyche, landscape provided a means of escape, an unencumbered absorption into a painless, floating world.

As he moved around the NSW countryside – Oberon, Marulan, Carcoar, Bathurst – and the glasshouse mountains in Queensland, he depicted the landscape in all its seasons and shifts of mood. Repetition of certain motifs symbolised states of mind: trees, rocks and arabesques of rivers echoing the flightpaths of birds, which in turn represented his relaxed journey through his own domain. But birds in particular held a poignant place in his visual language. He had loved them since his childhood, and in his last phase of work they represented a yearning at once for domestic stability and personal freedom. It is not surprising Whiteley held two special exhibitions dedicated to the theme in Sydney: the first in 1979; the second in 1988 in his Surry Hills studio, four years before his death.

## K–6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ART** Is the lyrebird quiet or singing? How has Whiteley portrayed the action of this bird? Sketch birds in your local environment. Observe how they move. From memory, paint a work based on your observations. Consider using repetition of line or shapes. Include found objects which symbolise the bird or flight.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY** Research birds found in your local area. Find images of birds to assist with identification. Define the terms 'native' and 'introduced' species. Which categories do the birds in your area fall into? Create a table for documenting sightings. Compare results with other students. Present your findings as a science report.

## 7–12 FRAMING QUESTIONS

- Whiteley had a life-long passion for birds. Reflect on the symbolic nature of birds and what they may have meant to Whiteley. Select a bird to represent you. Sketch a series of drawings based on your selected bird and an aspect of your life; combine these into one cohesive composition. Make drawings from photographs, memories and written descriptions.
- The vibrations of sound are illustrated as various painterly marks and collage. Discuss how Whiteley captures the essence of the lyrebird. Examine the techniques Whiteley used to display movement and stillness.
- The small inscription in the corner reads: 'a pointless painting needs looking at for a long time in order to think about it.' What is Whiteley suggesting to the viewer?



# 7

## BIRDS

### The lyrebird 1972-73

oil, red earth, wood, cloth, lyre bird tail, ink and collage on canvas  
198 x 183.5 x 26 cm  
© Whiteley Estate



# 8

## LANDSCAPES

This series pays homage to that district of the Ecole de Paris that Marquet, Utrillo and Nicholas de Staël opened up, but most particularly it is still Pablo's cheek that gets one out of bed in the morning and off down the street with the sketch pad under arm ... the fifty-year old art student recording this extraordinary city the way one dreamt of doing thirty years ago.

BRETT WHITELEY in Whiteley 1990

In Whiteley's late works his assured technique and style focused on his love of travel, landscapes and birds. Travels to London, Morocco, Japan and Paris allowed him to be anonymous and concentrate on his passion of drawing. These works reflected a state of mind still questioning, enthusiastic and excited by life. There were challenges still to explore in sculpture, drawing, collage and paint. *The 15 great dog pisses of Paris* 1989, was part of the Paris *Regard de Côte* series which Whiteley did over a two-month period between June and July 1989 while living in Rue de Tournon in Paris (the larger paintings he completed back at his Surry Hills studio). His only rule, self imposed, was to do 60 works in 60 days and this task he accomplished. Included in this series were drawings, paintings and photographs, which Whiteley considered were drawings of the eye.

When Whiteley first encountered Paris as a 20 year old, having just won the Italian Art Travelling Scholarship in 1960, he felt unable to visually express his time there. But the tools for drawing and painting he had acquired since, allowed him on his return years later to communicate his experiences of Paris.

The humorously titled *The 15 great dog pisses of Paris* suggests the urban streets littered with stains of the city's dogs, who are coveted and paraded by their owners. The work is grand in scale, which accentuates the sweep of line, and the use of collage interplays with the painted surface. The charcoal drawing is left as a conscious reminder of the journey of the painting. It highlights the legacy Matisse left to art and to which Whiteley was indebted. The physical texture of plaster on the wall sweeping toward the viewer enhances our experience. The gesture of the Seine flowing has been ragged with speed to suggest movement. The tonal relationship of butter creams and browns softens the image and reminds us of the stone from which Paris is built.

### K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ART** Look carefully at the street you live on and sketch pathways, walls and buildings. Take rubbings (frottage) and assemble this into one large work using a limited palette (colours).

**HSIE** The city of Paris has attracted artists from all over the world for centuries. Use your local library and the Internet to find more information about Paris. Select and research other artists who lived and worked in Paris.

### 7-12 FRAMING QUESTIONS

- Whiteley challenged himself to 'look at the obvious obscurely ... to introduce into each view the right amount of humour, or irony, or Dada'.\* How does *The 15 great dog pisses of Paris* illustrate this? Whiteley felt he could not capture Paris the first time he was there as a young man. Why did he think he was capable of responding to Paris as a 50 year old?
- During this period Whiteley set himself the task of creating a work a day over a two-month period. Why would Whiteley set such an ambitious task? Analyse the range of techniques used in this work and list them. Set yourself a goal for a body of work. Identify the subject matter, media and time frame. During this process record your experiences in your visual arts diary. Critique your work on completion. Did this process inspire or stifle you? Discuss the burden of this process.

\* Whiteley 1990, foreword



# 8

## LANDSCAPES

**The 15 great dog pisses of Paris 1989**  
 charcoal, oil, collage, wax, plaster on canvas  
 155 x 140 cm stretcher; 163 x 148 x 4.5 cm frame  
 © Whiteley Estate



# 9

## THE STUDIO & LATE WORKS

I am determined to crush a coloured picture from that area within me that is game and wild and intoxicated – I want a garden that is a smear of Cambodian lipstick, green and mauves and lettuce green and magenta purple and ultramarine and arctic pale blue with lemon and orange and cadmium yellow against apple green and baby pink apricots. North Queensland. Can I do it?

BRETT WHITELEY written in preparation for the film *Difficult pleasure* 1989

### The Studio

**1985** Brett and Wendy Whiteley bought the building at 2 Raper Street, at which time was operating as a T-shirt factory. The courtyard had been enclosed but the floors were concrete and the walls in a state of disrepair. It was the first time Whiteley had owned a studio, apart from his home at Lavender Bay.

**1985–87** Brett Whiteley renovated the site and initially covered the downstairs floor area with plywood and covered the walls with plasterboard. He then painted the walls white to create a pristine and formal gallery space and moved in permanently in 1987 when he and Wendy separated.

**1988** The exhibition *Birds* (5–19 July) was the only formal exhibition he held and curated in this space.

**1992** Brett died on 15 June at the age of 53. His daughter Arkie returned from London and lived here, fulfilling his wish to create a museum in the event of his death.

**1993** The NSW government purchased the property from Arkie along with ten key works, including *Alchemy*.

**1995** In February the Brett Whiteley Studio was opened to the public as a museum, funded by the NSW government and managed by the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

There are approximately two to three exhibitions held at the Brett Whiteley Studio each year. They consist of solo Whiteley exhibitions and group exhibitions which place Whiteley in context with his contemporaries. Each exhibition explores different aspects of Whiteley's art, influences and life.

### K–6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ART** Whiteley produced this work from memory. What do you think the meandering roads suggest? How has Whiteley dealt with perspective? Imagine flying over this landscape; describe how the rich, tropical colours make you feel. List the various elements of the area that Whiteley has depicted. Extend this painting by drawing the landscape beyond the boundaries of the canvas.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY** What is Far North Queensland renowned for? Research the climate, landscape and produce of this region. Why are certain products grown there?

### 7–12 FRAMING QUESTIONS

- Whiteley approached landscape painting with a tendency that he refers to as Chinese. Find images of traditional Chinese landscape painting and compare these images with *Far North Queensland – Port Douglas*. List the qualities you think Whiteley meant by the word 'Chinese' to describe this approach? Discuss the similarities and differences.

- Reflect on the quote below by Whiteley in terms of art making and motivation. Do you think Whiteley was successful in his goal?

I want a garden that is a smear of Cambodian lipstick, green and mauves and lettuce green and magenta purple and ultramarine and arctic pale blue with lemon and orange and cadmium yellow against apple green and baby pink apricots. North Queensland. Can I do it?\*

- Find examples of Whiteley's landscapes and identify the signs and symbols that formed part of his visual language. Use the quote above as an inspiration to create an artwork. Compare your interpretation of this quote to Whiteley's painting.

\* This statement, dated 3 March 1989, was one of several written by Whiteley in preparation for Don Featherstone's film on him entitled *Difficult pleasure*. It reads in full: 'After seeing Bonnard's "Violet Countryside 1946 ©", in the *Readers Digest Collection* at the NSW Art Gallery I am determined to crush a coloured picture from that area within me that is game and wild and intoxicated – I want a garden that is a smear of Cambodian lipstick, green and mauves and lettuce green and magenta purple and ultramarine and arctic pale blue with lemon and orange and cadmium yellow against apple green and baby pink apricots. North Queensland. Can I do it?'



# 9

## THE STUDIO & LATE WORKS

### Far North Queensland – Port Douglas 1992

oil, earth, charcoal, collage on plywood

183.5 x 198 cm board; 185 x 200 x 4 cm frame

© Whiteley Estate

