

JANET DAWSON SURVEY

EDUCATION KIT



Introduction

This Education Kit has been developed in response to the *Janet Dawson Survey* exhibition and seeks to enhance the experience and learning of art through fun and informative activities for school students in years K-6, 7-10, 11-12.

The material has been designed to be used in the classroom or during visits to the exhibition, and is a resource designed to support teachers & students.

Students and teachers can also refer to the *Janet Dawson Survey* catalogue for further critical and biographical information regarding Janet Dawson.

Tour Dates:

Bathurst Regional Art Gallery 1 December 2006 - 28 January 2007

Drill Hall Gallery ANU, Canberra ACT 15 February – 25 March 2007

S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney NSW 30 April – 10 June 2007

Queensland University Art Museum, Brisbane QLD 7 July – 19 August 2007

Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery, Hobart TAS 6 September – 21 October 2007

Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, VIC 30 October – 2 December 2007

Useful Resources:

www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au

www.nga.gov.au/landscapes/Daw.htm

www.ngv.vic.gov.au/collection/australian/painting/d/dawson_j/education_kit.html

Plant, Margaret, *Janet Dawson*, Art and Australia, Vol 17 No 4 Winter 1980, pages 337-346

Catalano, Gary, *A Natural History: an interview with Janet Dawson*, Art and Australia, Vol 34 No 3 Autumn 1997, pages 332-340

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, *The Drawings of Janet Dawson* (Catalogue), 22 June -11 August 1996

National Gallery Victoria, Melbourne, *Janet Dawson* 6 July - 19 August 1979

This Education Kit has been developed and designed by Emma Smith, Education and Public Programs Manager, Bathurst Regional Art Gallery and has been generously supported by Visions of Australia.

Front cover

Moon at dawn through a telescope, January 2000, oil on canvas, 122.0 cm diameter, collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra



Portraits

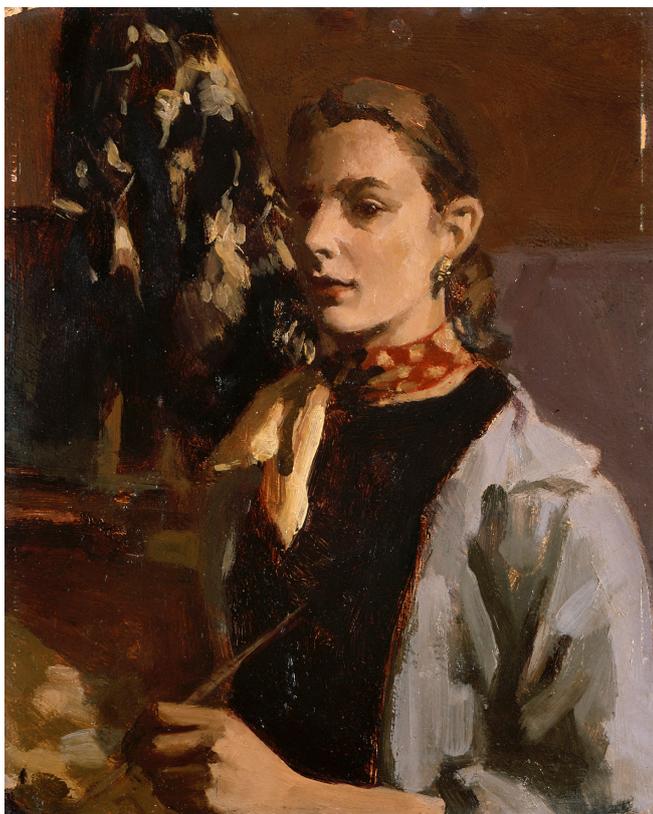


Plate 1
Self portrait, 1953, oil on canvas, 45.5 x 35.5 cm, collection:
National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, gift of the artist 2000



Plate 2
Michael Boddy reading, 1973, acrylic on canvas, 149.0 x
120.0 cm, collection: private collection, Melbourne

Throughout history many artists have used their friends, family and themselves as a subject to paint and draw. Janet Dawson is no exception and several of her portraits are present in this exhibition.

At the age of 18 Dawson completed *Self portrait* (plate 1), oil on canvas. It was painted at night in her evening art class and show her artist's work shirt over her neat office day-clothes. It depicts a very serious Dawson gazing directly at the viewer.

Twenty years later, Dawson won the Archibald Prize with the painting *Michael Boddy reading* (plate 2). She became the third woman in the history of the event to win the Archibald Prize. At the time, critics and the press proclaimed that the portrait had won convincingly*.

Since her student days Dawson has always painted friends and family. To this day Dawson still invites people to come and model for her once a week in her studio.

I love drawing and painting people, I never get bored. Many of my friends come and model for me. I think they like relaxing while I work away. Janet Dawson (Artist interview, October 2006, with Emma Smith, Education and Public Programs Manager, Bathurst Regional Art Gallery.)

* Peter Ross, *Lets Face It The History of the Archibald Prize*, 2001, published by Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Portraits

K-6

What is the difference between a portrait and a self portrait?

Select one of Janet Dawson's portraits. Imagine you are in the painting and answer the following questions:

What does it feel like to be painted?

Do you have to keep still?

Can you talk to the artist?

What are you thinking about?

What are you wearing?

What are you sitting on?

What is behind you?

Is it hot or cold?

Is anyone watching you?

What do you think about the finished portrait?

Establish a school based Archibald Prize in which the portraits depicted must be from your own school community. Select a panel of judges and organise a people's choice award.

7-10

Examine each portrait in the exhibition. Using your intuition describe how each person feels. Are they excited, scared or relaxed? Then explain the reasons behind your judgements and discuss with your class.

Create a series of self portraits by working from a mirror or a recent photograph. Experiment with different drawing materials, drawing surfaces and a range of colours to evoke the mood of each portrait.

Discuss the backgrounds in plates 1 & 2. Does the background of a portrait painting help the viewer to understand the work of art? Give reasons to support your answers.

Compare and contrast two portraits by Janet Dawson (or use plates 1 & 2 to complete the task).

11-12

Janet Dawson was the third female artist to win the Archibald Prize. Research other female artists who have been awarded the prize. Why do you think winning the Archibald Prize is so significant in an artist's career?

This exhibition is the first complete survey of Dawson's work since 1979.

Write a critical review of the exhibition. Do you think it covers all aspects of her art practice and artistic career? (To assist your answer refer to the timeline.)

Ask a friend or family member to sit for you. Produce a series of drawings in which you attempt to express your feeling about that person. Give consideration to the elements of art and design.

Art Practice

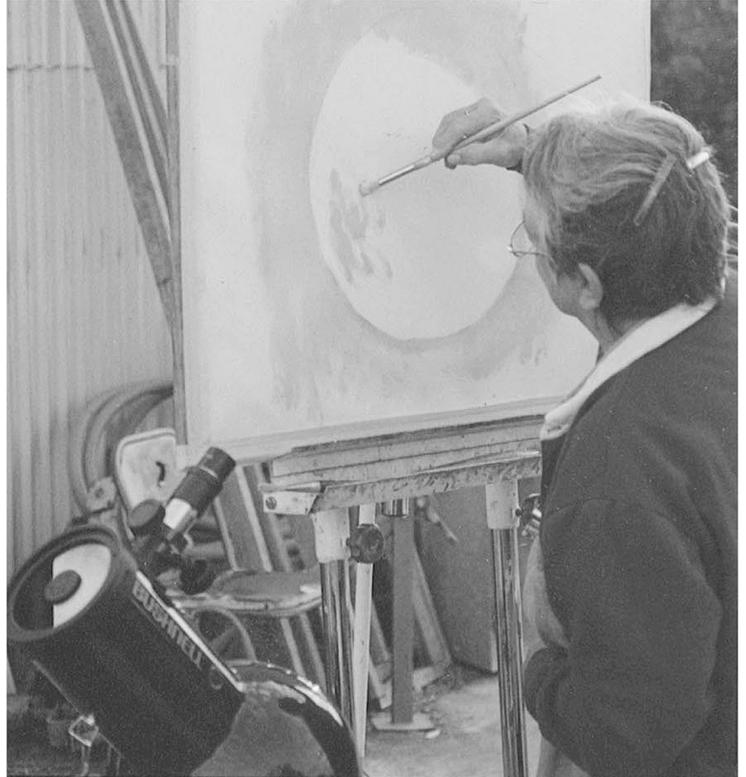
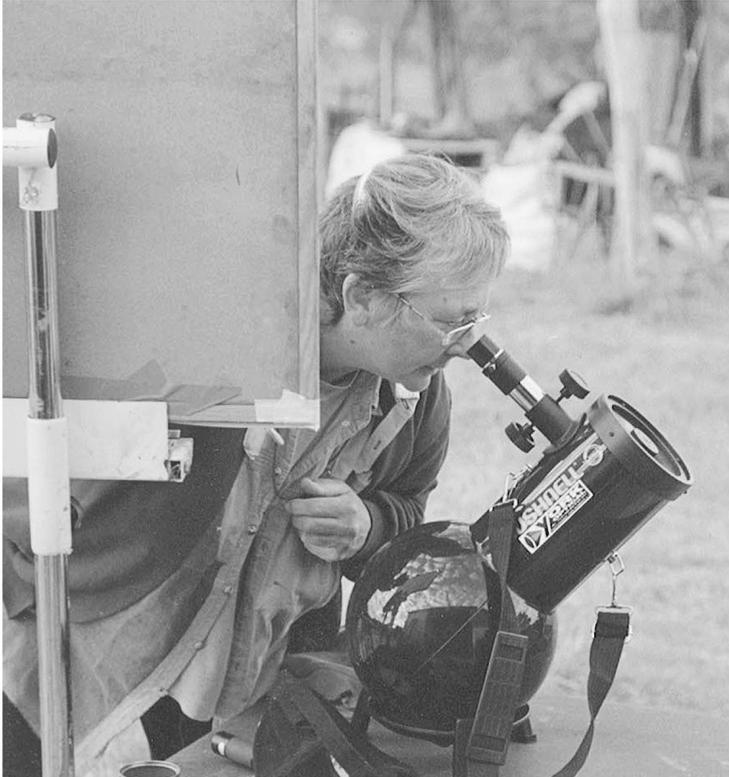


Plate 3
Janet Dawson, *Moon at dawn through a telescope study, Scribble Rock, dawn, 2000*. Photograph: Michael Boddy.

K-6

Describe what the artist is doing in the photographs above?

List the equipment in the photograph.

What time of day do you think it is in the photograph? What is the artist painting onto the canvas?

7-10

Scientists often use telescopes to examine objects more closely. What is artist looking at? Describe her actions.

How does the telescope assist her artistic practice?

When in Dawson's early career do you think she would have used a telescope? (Hint: read the timeline.)

11-12

Discuss how the artist painted *Moon at dawn through a telescope*, January 2000. Use the photographs above to support your response (if you look closely you will see the moon is actually upside down as seen through a telescope).

Landscapes



Plate 4
Balgagal Creek gums 2, 1975, acrylic on bleached linen canvas, 2 panels,
122.0 x 213.4 cm, collection: Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South
Australian Government Government Grant 1975

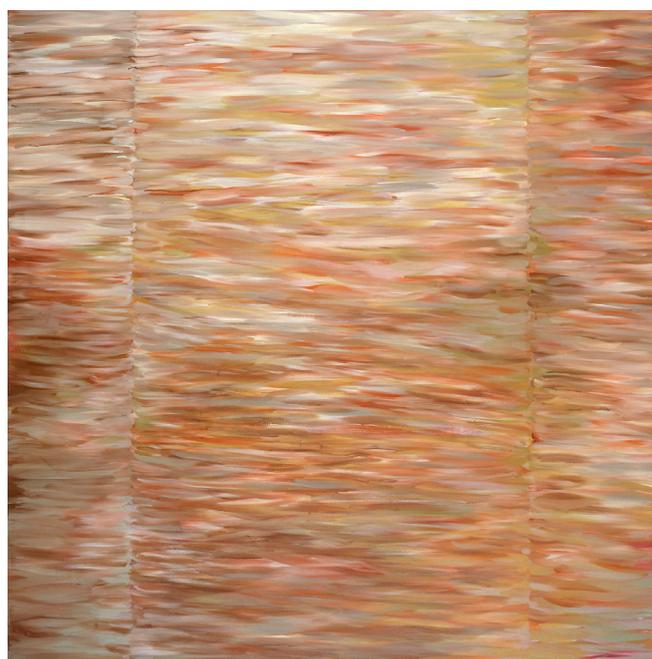


Plate 5
Ripple 4, 1970, acrylic on bleached linen canvas, 175.3 x
175.0 cm, collection: Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria,
purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board 1981

Australia is known throughout the world for its unique landscape, intense light and colour. Many artists since European settlement have been attracted to these aspects of the Australian bush and have tried to capture it on canvas. Janet Dawson is no exception.

The move to Binalong in rural New South Wales (1974) brought about a shift in Dawson's subject matter. She became absorbed in her immediate landscape and embraced the change through her art practice. Many works from this period relate directly to Dawson's interest in the landscape including changing seasons, organically grown produce, shifting skyscapes, animals and native flora.

Nothing should be forbidden when it comes to drawing, everything and anything is a subject. The advice given to me as a young girl was lots of paper, lots of pencils, no rubbers, no rulers and to keep drawing. Everyday I practice, everyday I draw. Janet Dawson (Artist interview, October 2006 with Emma Smith, Education and Public Programs Manager, Bathurst Regional Art Gallery.)

Landscapes

K-6

What is the definition of a landscape?

Step into one of the landscapes by Janet Dawson and explore this environment through your senses. What do you see? What do you feel beneath your feet? What sounds can you hear? What time of day or season is it? Compare your thoughts with the class.

Have a close look at the painting *Balgagal Creek gums 2*. Can you see how the artist has used lots of layers and thick brush strokes? What colours stand out the most? Now step back from the painting and discuss the shapes you can see. Do the colours look different? What shapes can you identify?

Explore your local environment. Collect leaves and other materials to make a series of rubbings. Cut them out, hand-colour and arrange on paper to form an abstract landscape. Display them in your classroom.

7-10

Using the elements of art and design analyse the painting *Ripple 4* (plate 5). Consider line, colour, texture and movement. How have the two dominant vertical lines been created by the artist?

Use your immediate environment, the school grounds, the natural and man-made to create your own *plein air* (meaning in the open air or outside) observational drawing on A3 sheet of paper. Try to make this drawing as detailed as possible.

Take your drawing and cut it up into 12 pieces (use a variety of lines), then reassemble your drawing and stick it down.

What has changed? Are any objects or places still recognisable?

11-12

Balgagal Creek gums 2 (plate 4) informs the viewer that the artist has been influenced by characteristics and atmosphere of the Balgalal Creek gums. What structural elements of the painting inform the viewer that this painting is a landscape?

Research other Australian artists that have painted the landscape from 1970-1980. Analyse how their work compares to landscapes by Dawson.

Discuss the advice given to Janet Dawson as a young girl (refer to quote on previous page). What advice have you been given about pursuing a career in the visual arts? Do you think Dawson's family and teachers were encouraging her talents?

Colour & Line



Plate 6
With sauce, 1963, oil on canvas, 105.0 x 122.0 cm, collection: Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australian Government Grant 1996

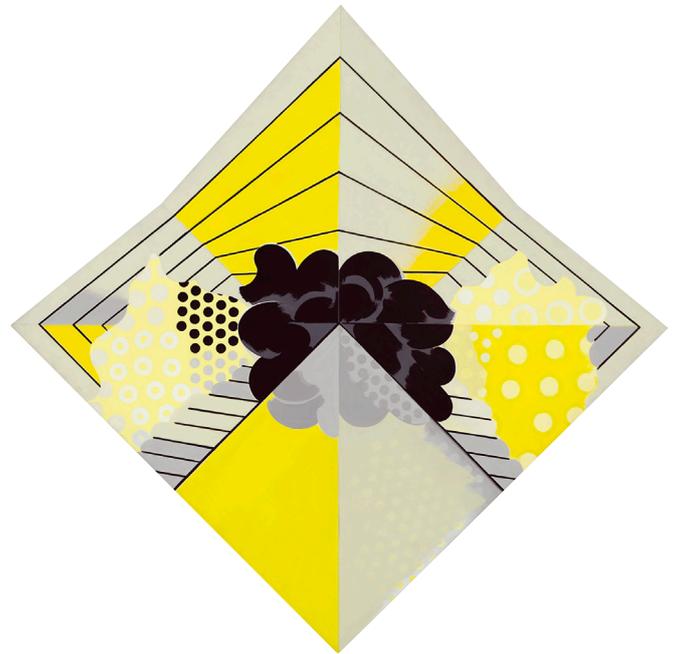


Plate 7
Heeny's rose, 1968, acrylic on composition board, 171.0 x 172.0 cm, collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, gift of Peggy Feuser 1976

In 1960 Dawson returned to Australia after completing her studies and overseas travel (refer to timeline for details). Her practice during this decade was dominated by bold flat colour, shaped boards and strong sharp lines with very little tone. Dawson's interest in the colourfield movement, however, did not last as she found the movement too limiting for her practice.

K-6

List the colours and shapes in the paintings *With sauce* and *Heeny's rose*.

What colours dominate Dawson's 1960s period?

Why do you think the artist titled the painting *With sauce*?

What name would you give the painting? Give reasons for your answer.

7-10

In the 1960s Dawson experimented with painting illusions. Look closely at *Wall 5*, *Wall 6* and *Heeny's rose*.

In particular *Wall 5* plays tricks on the viewer. Parts of the painting appear to jut forward then recede. How does the artist achieve this?

Create your own painting that tricks the viewer by using lines and tones to make an illusion.

11-12

Dawson is often credited with being amongst those who introduced colourfield painting to Australia. Works such as Study for Lighthouse, Heeny's rose and the Laminex Tables employ saturated colour and shaped board of colourfield but ultimately Dawson found the movement too limiting.

Christine France, Curator.

Discuss this statement in relation to Dawson's artistic practice.

Still Life

A still life work of art represents inanimate (non-living) objects such as bottles, flowers, fruit and dead animals. These objects are usually carefully positioned and then painted by the artist. Still life traditions date back to the Dutch masters of the sixteenth century. Like the Dutch masters of this period, Dawson selects objects from her everyday domestic life and environment. However, she avoids placing objects into position and prefers to paint objects as they arrive in the studio or on the table, as can be seen in still lifes such as *Lamb on newspaper*, *Potatoes in a hat*, and *Goose feet and potatoes*.



Plate 8
Scribble Rock cauliflower, 1993-1997, oil on canvas, 122.0 x 122.0 cm, private collection, Bowral, New South Wales



Plate 9
Potatoes in a hat, 1988, oil on canvas, 30.0 x 41.0 cm, private collection, Sydney

I don't pose my still lifes as many do. They arrive on the table, things are cleared, there's a bit of rearrangement, generally things already there are selected to take part and the work starts.
Janet Dawson (quote from *Extracts from an essay on Janet Dawson* by Christine France, 2006).

Still Life

K-6

List the objects and colours in the still life painting *Scribble Rock cauliflower* (plate 8).

Look at the *Red Cabbage drawing* series. Describe what happens to the cabbage.

Set up your own still life in the classroom consisting of fresh vegetables. Each day for 2 weeks (or until the vegetables die) do a drawing of the still life.

Watch closely how the objects and colours change. Also take photographs to document the process.

7-10

Research other artists who have painted still lifes.

Locate the names of at least three artworks and artists that you really like and sketch these works in your visual diary. Are there any similarities to Janet Dawson's still life paintings?

Create your own drawing or painting of a still life. Rather than setting up a still life, try and find objects that happen to be next to each other by accident.

Sometimes contrasting objects make for the most interesting works of art!

11-12

The charcoal and pastel drawing *Cauliflower* is Dawson's study for the painting *Scribble Rock cauliflower* (plate 8).

What elements in the drawing still exist in the painting?

What do you think Dawson was investigating in the drawing?

Which image do you feel is more resolved?

Give reasons to support your answer.

Select a still life drawing or painting in the exhibition that you think best illustrates Dawson's quote about still lifes (refer to quote on previous page).

Timeline

- 1935 Janet Dawson is born in Sydney and spends her early childhood in the rural town of Forbes, NSW
- 1941 Dawson's father enlists in the army and the family moves to Melbourne
- 1946 Dawson studies privately with H. Septimus Power in Melbourne
- 1951 Enrols at the National Gallery School in Melbourne
- 1956 Is awarded the National Gallery of Victoria Travelling Scholarship
- 1956 Travels to London to study Lithography at the Slade School of Fine Art
- 1958-59 Views exhibitions by Wassily Kandinsky & New American Painting
- 1959 Wins the Boise Scholarship for lithography and travels to Europe
Settles in Paris and works at the lithographic printing workshop, *Atelier Patris*
- 1960 Returns to Sydney
- 1961 Exhibits at Gallery A, Flinders Lane, Melbourne. Dawson also works at Gallery A and is involved in all aspects of its operation: from running the print shop to conducting art classes
- 1964 Moves to Sydney to concentrate on painting
- 1968 Exhibits in *The Field* exhibition in Melbourne
Marries actor and playwright Michael Boddy
- 1969 Starts working as an assistant at the Australian Museum and becomes involved in scientific drawing, illustrations, exhibition and display case design

Makes props and sets for a number of theatre productions
- 1973 Wins the Archibald Prize
- 1974 Janet Dawson and Michael Boddy move to Binalong, NSW
- 1981 Janet Dawson and Michael Boddy move to Canberra to help establish Theatre ACT, where Dawson works as a production designer and continues her artistic practice
- 1985 Dawson and Boddy return to live permanently in Binalong
- 1994-95 Works on the Red Cabbage series, purchased by National Gallery of Australia
- 2006 *Janet Dawson Survey* exhibition opens at Bathurst Regional Art Gallery and tours nationally in 2007

Exhibition & Curator

Janet Dawson Survey examines the career of one of Australia's most accomplished artists from the 1950s through to the present day.

Curated by Christine France, 72 works from 1953 to 2006 were selected for the exhibition. These works have been borrowed from a large number of public art galleries and private collections including the Art Gallery of New South Wales (4), National Gallery of Victoria (3), Art Gallery of South Australia (3), National Portrait Gallery (2), Parliament House Collection (2) and the National Gallery of Australia (23)*.

K-6

What does it mean to borrow something?

Look on the labels next to the works of art in the exhibition to see what collections they belong to and mark all the different places on a map of Australia.

7-10

Curate your own solo exhibition of works you have created at high school (or in the last 2 years). You can only select 10 works to demonstrate your artistic development. What works do you select and why?

11-12

Museums and art galleries play a significant role in informing audiences about practicing artists and movements in the visual arts. (Quote taken from 2001 NSW Higher School Certificate exam question)

Discuss this statement with reference to the *Janet Dawson Survey*.

The role of the curator is to develop, research and make artworks available for public viewing within the context of an exhibition. The word 'curator' literally means 'keeper'. There are curators of collections which hold key positions in museums and galleries and there are exhibition curators.

Curators such as Christine France spend a great deal of time researching, locating and selecting works for exhibition. They are the primary interpreter for the work on behalf of the artist. They write text, research bibliographies and consider exhibition space for display. Finally, they make the works available to audiences for viewing.

K-6

As a class curate your own exhibition of Australian artists. You could select a theme such as landscapes or still lifes. Each student could research one work of art to present to the rest of the class.

7-10

Re-curate the *Janet Dawson Survey* exhibition for a small gallery that can only display 30 works. Which works would you select to best illustrate Dawson's 50 year artistic practice.

11-12

The main objective of the exhibition is to rediscover and celebrate Janet Dawson's remarkable career and acknowledge her major contribution to Australian art. Christine France, Curator, 2006

How do you think the curator has achieved this exhibition objective?

* Please note that due to loan conditions 66 works will be displayed at the first three touring venues and 62 works at the last three venues.