

Exploring and responding

Art and science

Alexander von Humboldt was an influential German scientist and explorer who believed that scientific enquiry was an important aspect of an artist's work, and that artists could visualise information about aspects of the environment that scientists could not.

- ◆ Research Humboldt and explain in your own words the significance of his work and ideas.
- ◆ Identify and discuss a work by Eugene von Guérard that you believe reflects Humboldt's ideas.

Painting pictures with words

Von Guérard skilfully used fine brushstrokes and visual elements such as colour, line and shape to create landscape paintings with incredible detail, precision and atmosphere.

- ◆ Identify a landscape painting by von Guérard that interests you.
- ◆ Describe the view in this work to a friend who cannot see the painting. Instead of using the painter's tools of paint, colour, line and shape, describe the experience of the landscape in front of you, using rich descriptive language. Your description should try to evoke feeling and atmosphere as well as physical features of the view.
- ◆ With your partner, compare and contrast the experience offered by each of these ways of 'seeing' the landscape.

Imagining a new land

Weatherboard Creek Falls, Jamieson's Valley, New South Wales, 1862, was purchased by Frederick Dalgety in 1862, one of von Guérard's most important patrons. Dalgety showed this painting at the Royal Academy in London in 1865.

- ◆ Imagine you had never visited Australia and this painting was all that you knew about this 'new' country.
- ◆ What ideas about Australia would you have from the way von Guérard has depicted the landscape?

Building on the landscape tradition

Von Guérard's work can be seen as building on a tradition of landscape painting. The work of the great seventeenth-century landscape artists who worked in Italy, such as Claude Lorraine (c.1604–1682), Nicholas Poussin (1594–1665) and Salvator Rosa (1615–1673), and artists of the Dutch school such as Salomon van Ruysdael (c.1602–70) and Jacob van Ruisdael (1628–82) provided strong foundations for this tradition.

- ◆ Investigate the work of these earlier landscape artists. If possible view the work of these artists in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria. <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore>
- ◆ Choose one of these artists and one of their paintings that interests you.
- ◆ Compare and contrast this painting with a painting by von Guérard, discussing similarities and differences in subject matter, composition and technique.
- ◆ Suggest reasons for the similarities and differences you find.

Whose perspective?

Tell the story of the journey to Mount Kosciuszko taken by von Neumayer and his companions from the perspective of one of the participants or some other person of the period, such as a family member, a scientist or a journalist.

- ◆ Research the journey by observing von Guérard's works and/or reading excerpts from the writing of von Neumayer or other historical accounts.
- ◆ In telling the story consider what might be unique about the perspective you are taking and how this will influence the genre of writing (i.e. report, poem, diary entry), what you include in the story, how the story is told and for whom it is told.
- ◆ Use rich, descriptive language to engage the viewer in the story of this expedition.

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Compare and contrast

Look at the work of other Australian artists for whom the landscape and natural environment have provided important inspiration and subject matter. For example: Frederick McCubbin (1855–1917), Tom Roberts (1856–1931), Jane Sutherland (1853–1928), Clara Southern (1860–1940), Russell Drysdale (1912–1981), Rosalie Gascoigne (1917–1999), Fred Williams (1927–1982), John Wolseley (b.1938) and Lauren Berkowitz (b.1965).

- ◆ Research the work of one of these artists that interests you.
- ◆ Compare and contrast the art practice of this artist with that of von Guérard, including discussion of at least one artwork by each artist. In your discussion consider significant similarities/differences in the artists' careers, working methods, materials and techniques, and approach to subject matter.
- ◆ Suggest reasons for the similarities and differences you find.

The legacy of von Guérard

There is a long tradition in the visual arts of artists learning from the work of other artists. The Australian landscape painter Fred Williams (1927–1982) admired von Guérard and created several paintings inspired by his work.

- ◆ Explore and outline in a few sentences the links between the work of von Guérard and Fred Williams.
Discuss a work by Fred Williams that reflects the influence of von Guérard. How is this influence evident in the Williams's painting?

<http://artsearch.nga.gov.au/Detail.cfm?IRN=100814&PICTAUS=TRUE>
http://www.deutscherandhackett.com/catalogue18/lot_number9.html
http://www.deutscherandhackett.com/catalogue10/lot_number25.html

Appropriating von Guérard

Some contemporary artists create new artworks by copying and reworking aspects of the work of other artists. This practice is often referred to as 'appropriation'. There are many different reasons why artists use appropriation. For example, they may wish to comment on or add to the meanings or ideas associated the image they are appropriating.

- ◆ Identify an artwork by a contemporary artist who has appropriated the work of von Guérard.
- ◆ Research this artwork and the von Guérard artwork which has been appropriated.
- ◆ Identify the similarities and differences between the two artworks.
- ◆ Suggest why the contemporary artist may have appropriated the artwork by von Guérard.
- ◆ What meanings and ideas does the contemporary artwork suggest to you? How does the appropriation of von Guérard's work contribute to these meanings?

Artists to consider:

Imants Tillers (b.1950)

<http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/Tillers/Default.cfm?MnuID=4&Essay=2>
http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/TILLERS/Download/TILLERS_EDUKIT.pdf
<http://cs.nga.gov.au/Detail.cfm?IRN=68991>

Seth Keen (b.1964)

<http://netsvictoria.org.au/new-artistpage-11/?PHPSESSID=375c85feeba68dc5f881f07b4b2edd5b>
<http://www.sethkeen.net/blog/locative-painting/>

Fergus Binns (b.1980)

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/06/24/2284362.htm?site=news>
<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/sundayarts/txt/s2386445.htm>