**Evening Shadows Rorschach after Johnstone 2011**


Johnstone's *Evening shadows, backwater of the Murray, South Australia 1880* was painted at a time when landscape artists were seeking to depict a particular sense of national identity. Quilty uses his Rorschach technique to create a contemporary reconstruction of a historical scene featuring three Aboriginals camping on the banks of the Murray River against the dying light of day.

The Rorschach test is a method of psychological evaluation based on a subject’s reading of ambiguous inkblots that have been folded in half. Originally designed to diagnose schizophrenia, it gained more popularity as a general personality test. The Rorschach test has also been suggested as a tool to trigger memories and experiences of trauma.

Creating a Rorschach painting involves a process of creation, destruction and re-creation in which a blank canvas is pressed onto another canvas that already carries the thickly painted image. Quilty’s Rorschach landscapes comprise several panels, requiring the process to be repeated a number of times and showing evidence of his ‘meticulous control of paint, colour and composition’.  

The relationship between how he paints and what he paints is often a feature of Quilty’s visual language. What is the artist trying to communicate about European contact with Indigenous Australians through his use of the inkblot technique in this appropriation of a nineteenth-century Australian landscape?

The figure of the Aboriginal man at the water’s edge in the lower-right panel has almost been obliterated through the Rorschach process. How might we interpret this with respect to Australia’s colonial history?

**The Island 2013**

As a Rorschach, we would expect each half of *The Island 2013* to be the mirror image of the other. How has Quilty altered the balance and composition of the work? What effect does it have?

Look closely. How would you describe the island? What can you see in the shadows? Write down a list of words and share these with others.
Following his return from Afghanistan, Quilty ‘could not help but view the landscape through the lens of his own experience of place’. This is evident in his reimagining of the Hawkesbury River in *Transparent Might, after Afghanistan* 2011, which is based on one of Arthur Streeton’s landscapes of the river from 1896. Quilty has transformed the Great Dividing Range into the Hindu Kush and graffitied ‘Afghanistan’ across the mountains in white correction fluid.

The title of the work, *Transparent Might, after Afghanistan*, is a nod to another of Streeton’s paintings of the Hawkesbury River, *The purple noon’s transparent might* 1896. Streeton’s work in turn takes its title from a line in *Stanzas Written in Dejection, near Naples*, a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley about feelings of alienation and melancholy set against a beautiful landscape.

Discuss in small groups whether you think these acts of defacement are an effective means of deconstructing and reconstructing the landscape. Do you think the use of correction fluid rather than paint is significant?

In the composition and title of the work, Quilty want us to see a connection between the two landscapes. If this use of comparison is a form of visual communication, what is Quilty inviting viewers to think about?

Purple, or rather lilac, is Ben Quilty’s favourite colour. But Quilty’s lilac isn’t quaint or even polite — it’s a bruise two days in. It’s the colour of regret and the colour of contradiction. Brutal and beautiful.

Quilty’s lilac was inspired by the pale blue of Streeton’s palette. Streeton’s blue captures the light and heat of the Australian sun hitting a serene, seemingly untouched landscape. A similar palette was used by Streeton during his time as a war artist in France in World War One. Consider his painting *Bellicourt Tunnel* 1919.

Do you think that Streeton’s blue here carries a similar meaning as Quilty’s lilac? Can the meaning of colour change for an artist through experiences such as war?
CAPTIONS
Ben Quilty
Australia b.1973
Irin Irinji
2018 / Oil on linen / 12 panels, 224 x 551cm (overall) / Private collection
Photograph: Mim Stirling

Other artists
HJ Johnstone / Australia 1835–1907 / Evening shadows, backwater of the Murray, South Australia 1880 / Oil on canvas / 120.6 x 184.1cm / Gift of Mr Henry Yorke Sparks 1881 / Collection: Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
Arthur Streeton / Australia 1867–1943 / The purple noon’s transparent might 1896 / Oil on canvas / 61.1 x 81.2cm / Purchased with the assistance of a special grant from the Government of Victoria, 1979 / Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Arthur Streeton / Australia 1867–1943 / Bell Court Tunnel 1919 / Oil on canvas
148.2 x 256cm / Collection: Australian War Memorial, Canberra

ENDNOTES
3 Slade, ‘The colour of Quilty’, p.27.

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