

Being Human: The Graphic Work of George Baldessin

Exhibition dates 3 May - 19 October 2014

Venue Heide I, Heide Museum of Modern Art

Curator Linda Short



George Baldessin
Untitled (Figure with Curved Base) 1976
etching and aquatint
2nd state, artist's proof
plate 47.8 x 37.5 cm
Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
Gift of Tess, Gabriel and Ned Baldessin 2010
©Estate of George Baldessin

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Printmaker, Sculptor, Painter

Italian born artist George Baldessin exerted considerable influence on the revival of printmaking in Melbourne during the 1960s and 70s. His innovations in intaglio printing techniques—constantly exploring the processes of etching and aquatint—progressed in tandem with his work in sculpture and painting; however, it is as a printmaker that he is best known.



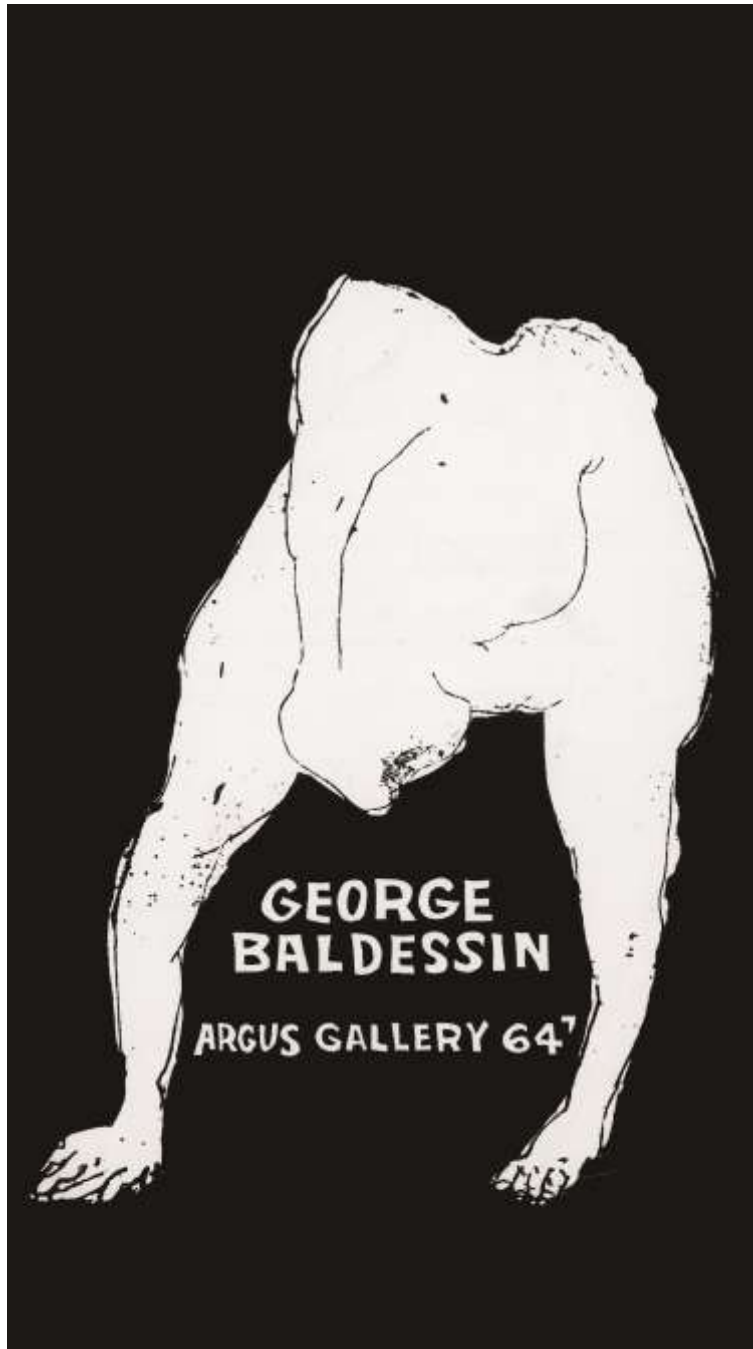
George Baldessin
Mary Magdalene 1978 - 85
bronze
210 x 32 x 21 cm
Heide Museum of Modern Art,
Melbourne
Gift of Joan Clemenger 1986

After viewing the exhibition *Being Human* in Heide I, walk down the path to Heide II, the modernist house. George Baldessin's sculpture *Mary Magdalene* can be found in the small courtyard in front of Heide II.

What similarities and differences can you see between Baldessin's two dimensional prints and drawings and his three dimensional sculpture?

Introduction

Being Human presents a selection of Baldessin's prints and drawings from the Heide Collection, which ranges from the time of the artist's first exhibition at Melbourne's Argus Gallery in 1964 through to the year of his untimely death in 1978, aged thirty-nine. Throughout his intensive career Baldessin attracted critical acclaim for his radical approach to the human figure, specifically his dramatic navigation of the female form.

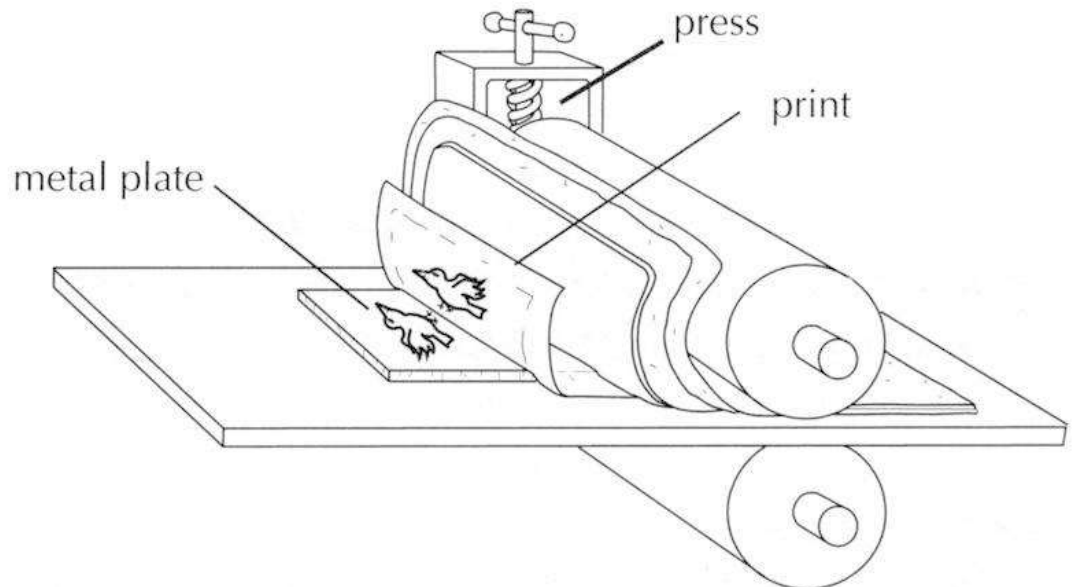


catalogue cover, *George Baldessin*,
Argus Gallery, Melbourne, 1964
Image courtesy of Australian
Galleries, Melbourne

The figure that appears on the Argus Gallery catalogue is a detail Baldessin extracted from one of his etchings. How has the artist distorted the human form in this image? Describe the use of art elements and principles.

Printmaking techniques

Baldessin was a master of intaglio printing. Intaglio printmaking techniques involve an image being incised onto a metal plate using acid. When printing, the ink settles into the areas of the metal plate's surface that have been eaten away by the acid. As the plate is passed through a press the image is printed onto the paper.



Baldessin chose the intaglio techniques of etching and aquatint to produce many of his artworks.

Etching

A metal plate, such as zinc, is coated in a waxy, acid-resistant 'ground'. The artist then scratches their image into the plate using an etching needle, exposing areas of the metal. The plate is treated with acid, which eats away at the exposed metal, incising the image onto the plate.



Aquatint

Aquatinting is the process in which an etching plate is lightly sprayed with enamel spray paint before being treated with acid. The acid eats away at the areas between the tiny particles of spray paint and produces a surface texture of very small dots. These dots hold ink and create tonal variations in the plate and resulting print.

An intaglio printing plate can also be incised by **engraving**, **drypoint** and **mezzotint**. Research these intaglio techniques and find examples of each.



zinc etching plates by George Baldessin
Being Human: The Graphic Work of George Baldessin
Installation view, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne

Closely inspect the etching plates that feature in this exhibition. Notice the lines, shapes and textures that have been incised into the surface to create the images.

Can you find the corresponding prints on display? What do you notice about the orientation of the image?

From your knowledge of the intaglio printing process, what other factors do you think impact on the final print?



George Baldessin
The Tea Cup 1967
zinc etching plate
30.5 x 27.8 cm
Courtesy of the Estate of George Baldessin

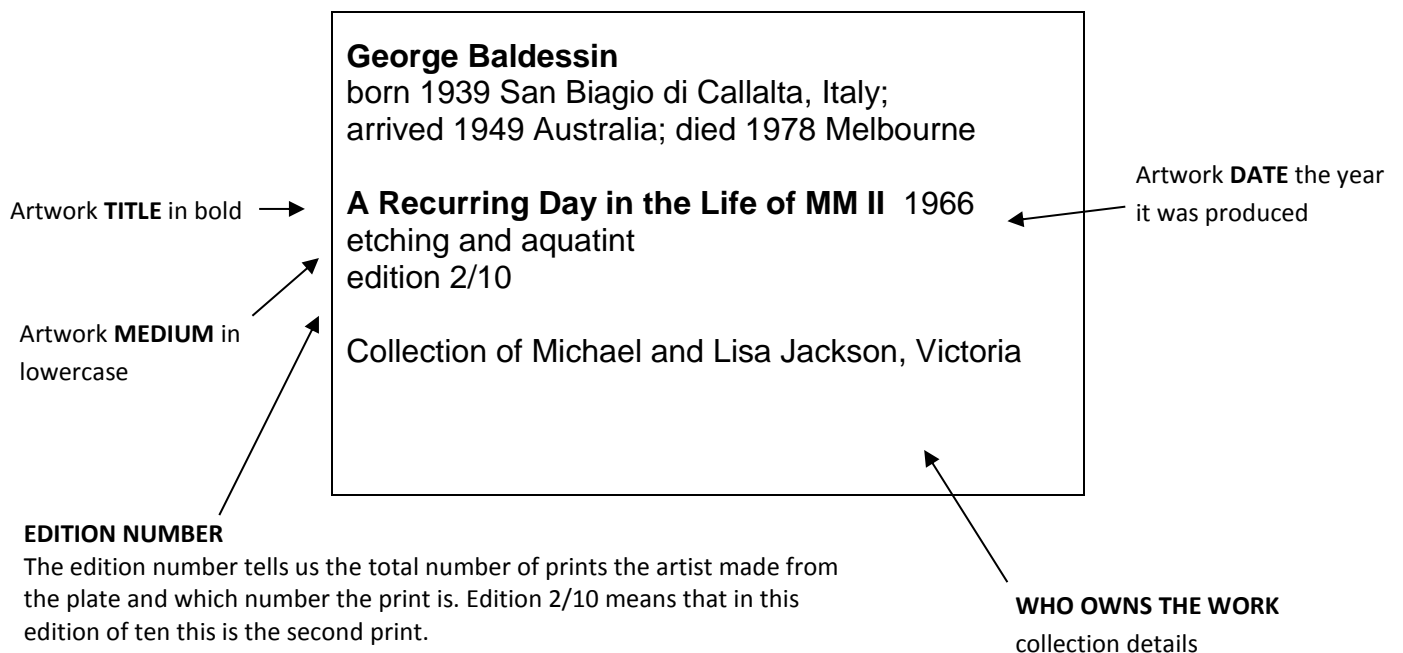
Baldessin felt that the ideal state for his images was when they were inked up on the plate before printing.

Identifying artworks

How can we tell which media/materials have been used to produce an artwork?
What other information can be found on the wall label?

Artist's **NAME** in bold for clarity and instant recognition

WHERE THE ARTIST WAS BORN AND DATE if the artist was born overseas, the date they arrived in Australia. The year they died if applicable.





George Baldessin
Stars and Sawdust III 1963
colour etching and aquatint
artist's proof
15.8 x 25.6 cm
Collection of Michael and Lisa Jackson, Victoria
© Estate of George Baldessin

Find an artwork in the exhibition that is an intaglio print and record the following information:

Artist's details

Title

Date

Materials

Edition

Look closely at the artwork and describe the use of line and tone.

Describe the steps the artist may have taken to create this artwork.

What ideas do you think the artist is trying to convey? What do you see that makes you say that?

Complete a small sketch of the artwork in your visual diary

Mark making

George Baldessin uses expressive line work and mark-making in his prints and drawings. Explore the elements of line, tone, texture and shape by drawing some of the marks you can see.



Influences and ideas

Baldessin drew on a number of artistic and cultural sources, from traditional Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints to experimental New Wave cinema. From such influences he evolved a powerful pictorial language as a means to articulate the tensions, paradoxes and ambiguities found in so much of human experience.

Examples of Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints:



Kitagawa Utamaro (Japanese, c.1753–1806)
Midnight: Mother and Sleepy Child
 1790
 polychrome woodblock print
 36.5 x 24.4cm
 Image from: The Metropolitan Museum of Art
www.metmuseum.org



Katsushika Hokusai (Japanese, 1760–1849)
The Great Wave at Kanagawa (from a Series of Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji) c. 1831–33
 polychrome woodblock print
 25.7 x 37.9 cm
 Image from: The Metropolitan Museum of Art
www.metmuseum.org

Can you see the stylistic influence of traditional Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints in Baldessin's work?


Find an example in the Baldessin exhibition to describe the visual qualities the artworks share.



Artist-colleagues

The exhibition also includes prints by artists closely associated with Baldessin, including Jock Clutterbuck, Roger Kemp, Les Kossatz, Jan Senbergs and Fred Williams, all of whose work offers a vivid context for considering his graphic oeuvre. These artists were among the regular visitors to Baldessin's busy atelier-style studio in the Winfield Building in Collins Street in the late 1960s, and part of the artistic community that subsequently gathered at his property in semi-rural St Andrews, which now operates in memory of the artist as The Baldessin Press. Baldessin's generous support of his artist-colleagues was a vital part of his contribution to this dynamic period of Melbourne printmaking which, as his widow Tess Edwards Baldessin recalls, was fuelled by his 'passionate belief in art, creativity and people'.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Select one or more of Baldessin's artworks to make your comparisons.

	What is presented in each artwork, and how?	What are the most important art elements and design principles in each artwork and what sensory effects or other meanings and ideas do these communicate?	Which materials and processes have been used to make each artwork?
<p>George Baldessin Title Date Materials Edition</p>			
<p>Roger Kemp born 1908 Bendigo, Victoria; died 1987 Melbourne</p>  <p><i>Concept Four</i> c.1975 etching edition 10/35 plate 49.5 x 98 cm; sheet 75 x 85 cm Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne Gift of Merle Kemp 1992 © Estate of Roger Kemp</p>			

	What is presented in each artwork, and how?	What are the most important art elements and design principles in each artwork and what sensory effects or other meanings and ideas do these communicate?	Which materials and processes have been used to make each artwork?
<p>George Baldessin Title Date Materials Edition</p>			
<p>Fred Williams born 1927 Melbourne; died 1982 Melbourne</p>  <p><i>The Boy Friend</i> 1956 etching, aquatint, engraving and drypoint edition 2/16 21.8 x 18.1 cm Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne Purchased from John and Sunday Reed 1980 © Lyn Williams</p>			
<p>Les Kossatz born 1943 Melbourne; died 2011 Melbourne</p>  <p><i>God's Walk IV</i> 1964 etching artist's proof 25.7 x 27.8 cm Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne Bequest of John and Sunday Reed 1982 © Estate of Les Kossatz</p>			

VCE Art: Analytical Frameworks

FORMAL FRAMEWORK is used to analyse how an artwork's formal elements and principles contribute to its meanings and messages.



George Baldessin
Head 1965
 etching and aquatint
 artist's proof
 plate 46 x 30.3 cm
 Heide Museum of Modern Art,
 Melbourne
 Gift of Russell Zeeng 1986
 © Estate of George Baldessin

Look closely at George Baldessin's artwork *Head* and complete a visual analysis of formal elements of the artwork:

Visual analysis

- Describe the subject matter – what can you see?
- How have the formal elements of **line, colour, tone, texture, shape**, sound and **form** including focal point and space been applied by the artist and to what effect?
- How do these qualities contribute to the meanings and messages of the work?

Technique

- What materials and techniques have been used? How have the materials been utilised and applied in the artwork? How has the artwork been made? Precisely? Carefully? Roughly? Expressively? Something else?
- How do the materials used or the technical skills shape or affect interpretation?

Style

- What are the distinctive stylistic qualities of the artwork and how do they contribute to meaning? How does the work relate to other works in a similar style?

Symbols and metaphors

- What physical aspects of the artwork contain symbolic meaning and use of metaphor? This may include the use of formal art elements, the compositional arrangement of figures or objects, the medium or the technique used by the artist, the style in which it is created.
- Use the Analytical Frameworks to construct a response to a different artwork you have seen in this exhibition.

PERSONAL FRAMEWORK is used to interpret how an artist's experiences, feelings, thinking and/or personal philosophy can be reflected in an artwork. It can also be used to gain awareness of the effect of the viewer's cultural background and experience on the interpretation of the artwork.

- What relationship does the artwork have to the artist's life and experiences? What visual evidence supports this reading? Has the artist used a specific process or practice in creating the artwork that may reflect their personal philosophy and ideas?
- How is the artwork linked to people, places or experiences of personal significance to the artist such as the artist's personal feelings, thinking, aspirations, beliefs, desires or preoccupations to memories, dreams or personal world?
- How does the experience and background of the viewer (consider yourself) affect the interpretation of the artwork?
- What are the symbols or metaphors explored or utilised in the artwork?
- What evidence in the artwork reflects aspects of the artist's life or ideas?
- Are there any symbols that might reflect the artist's personality?
- What is your personal response to this artwork?

CULTURAL FRAMEWORK is used to identify the influences on an artwork of the time, place, purpose, cultural and political settings in which it was made. These influences may include historical, political, social, socio-economic, religious contexts as well as aspects of ethnicity and gender

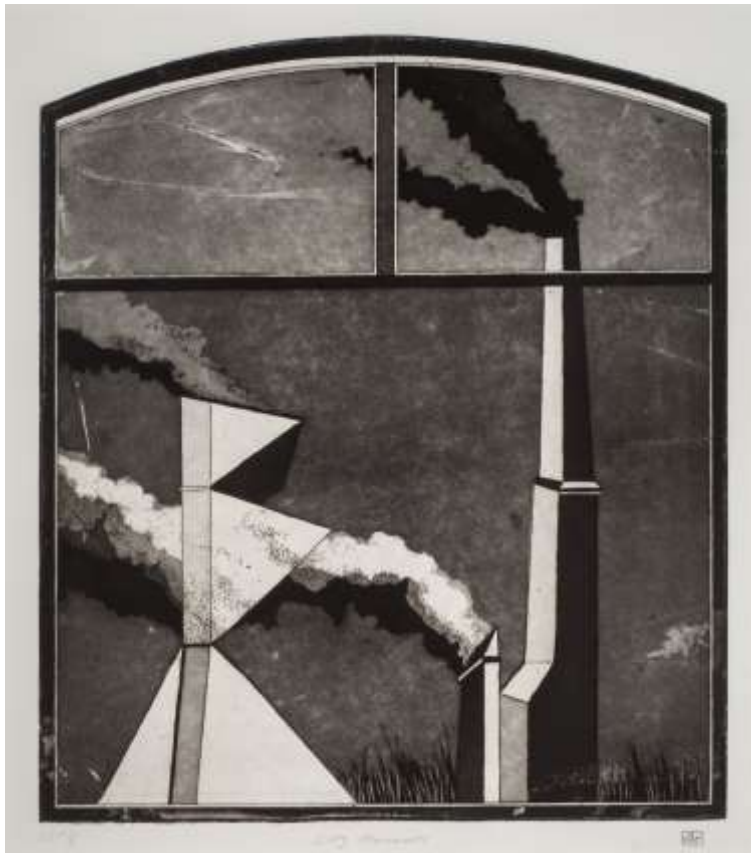
- How do the social, political, cultural or religious contexts of the artwork contribute to its meaning?
- How have historical or contemporary events shaped the intention of the artist or our understanding of the artwork's meaning?
- How do gender values reflect the social context of the time the artwork was produced? How do these values compare to the values of today?
- How does the physical placement of artworks affect their interpretation?
- How does the cultural background of the viewer influence the interpretation of an artwork?

Select an artwork that appears to represent a particular time period or societal concern.

- What aspects (subject matter, techniques) of the artwork reflect the culture in which it was made?
- Are there any cultural symbols used in the artwork?
- How does the social, political context in which the work was made contribute to its meaning?
- How does the intention of the artist differ from your view?
- What meaning did the artist give to the work? Are you interpreting it in the way that was intended? You may have to further research these ideas.

CONTEMPORARY FRAMEWORK is used to examine an artwork, irrespective of when it was created, in the context of contemporary art ideas and issues. For the purpose of this study contemporary art ideas and issues are those originating in the late twentieth century onwards. With a focus on current ideas and issues

- How do contemporary art ideas and issues challenge traditional understandings of the artwork and its' significance?
- How does the choice or presentation of subject matter or medium, materials and techniques reflect or challenge artistic or social traditions?
- How might artworks of the past take on new or different meanings, in the context of contemporary ideas and issues?



George Baldessin
City Monuments 1970
etching and aquatint
57.9 x 50.5 cm
Heide Museum of Modern Art,
Melbourne
Gift of Tess, Gabriel and Ned
Baldessin 2010
© Estate of George Baldessin

VCE Studio Art

Gallery Task, when viewing the work in the exhibition

An artwork employs a visual language to communicate.

How have aspects of **visual language** been applied in the artwork to effectively communicate ideas and meaning?

What are the **aesthetic qualities** /style of the artwork?

How does the work impact on me? How does it make me feel?

What can I observe about the artwork overall?

What **formal art elements** assist this feeling/observation?

Select from elements; line, colour, texture, tone, form and shape, sound, space, light and time.

What **art principles** have been applied to support the visual language?

Select from; composition balance, focal point, unity, harmony, contrast and rhythm.

What is the **subject matter** and communication of ideas?

How do visual elements support the **communication of ideas**?

What **materials and techniques** have been employed?

How do the materials and techniques contribute to the communication of ideas?

Classroom task: Art practices and styles

Research and investigate

How has the artist's life experiences contributed to the making of the artwork?

Where has the artist sourced ideas?

What life experiences have influenced the artist's work?

How has the artist developed aesthetic qualities and styles?

What can you find out about the techniques and processes the artist has used?

Are there any legal obligations or ethical considerations the artist may have considered in the making of their artworks? Such as appropriation, originality, copyright law or moral rights of artists?

How do the materials and techniques contribute to/reinforce the communication of ideas?

Please note: pages 2-3 & 9-10 of this education resource have been extracted from:
Short, L., *Being Human: The Graphic Work of George Baldessin*, exhibition text, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, 2014.

Further Reading

GEORGE BALDESSIN

Publications

Harriet Edquist, *George Baldessin: Paradox & Persuasion*, Australian Galleries, Melbourne, 2009

Memory Holloway and Robert Lindsay, *George Baldessin: Sculptures and Etchings –A Memorial Exhibition*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1983

Julianna Kolenberg, *George Baldessin Estate: Prints 1963–78*, Australian Galleries, Melbourne, 1997

Articles

Tess Edwards Baldessin, 'George Baldessin: A Personal Reflection 30 years on ...', *Imprint*, vol. 43, no. 3, Spring 2008, p. 3

Gary Catalano, 'The Secret Italian', *Aspect: Art and Literature*, no. 29/30, Autumn 1984, pp. 14–21

Patrick McCaughey, 'The Graphic Work of George Baldessin', *Art & Australia*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1969, pp. 153–9

Roger Palmer, 'George Baldessin in Retrospect: The Artist, His Art and Times', *Imprint*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1993, pp. 19–21

Websites

<http://baldessinpress.com.au/>

<http://www.australiangalleries.com.au/artists/9-artists/76-gerogebaldessin>

AUSTRALIAN PRINTMAKING & TECHNIQUES

Franz Kempf, *Contemporary Australian Printmakers*, Lansdowne Editions, Melbourne, 1976

<http://www.printsandprintmaking.gov.au>

<http://www.printcouncil.org.au/>

<http://www.spencerart.ku.edu/collection/print/glossary.shtml>

<http://www.magical-secrets.com/studio/glossary>

Heide Education

Heide offers a range of education programs that draw on its unique mix of exhibitions, architecture and landscape to provide a rich learning experience that goes beyond the classroom.

An education focussed visit to Heide Museum of Modern Art:

- provides a stimulating environment which helps to put learning into context, and promotes an understanding and appreciation of our rich, cultural heritage
- encourages motivation, by stirring curiosity and developing an intrinsic fascination for art that can only be satisfied by firsthand experience
- supports students to make cross-curricular links between different subject areas
- greatly benefits students who learn best through kinaesthetic activities
- nurtures creativity and enables social learning
- provides learning through experience and interaction which encourages students to build on prior expectations and beliefs to create new realities
- is a cultural experience that all students can enjoy

Looking at original works of art with a suitably trained educator also encourages the development of the following skills:

- **literacy:** by encouraging discussion and extending vocabulary
- **observation:** by focusing concentration on detail
- **critical thinking:** by demanding questions and informed conclusions
- **reflection:** by considering rationales behind thinking processes

All education programming and resources at Heide align with the VELS curriculum frameworks and VCE Study Designs. Further information about curriculum links is available at heide.com.au/education/school-visits/curriculum-links/

Teacher Professional Development

Heide offers a range of professional development programs for teachers of all year levels, including lectures, guided tours and workshops. Programs are designed to meet the VIT Standards of Professional Practice and Principles for Effective Professional Learning.

Bookings

Bookings are essential for all programs. For more information or a booking form visit heide.com.au/education/school-visits/ or contact Heide Education: (03) 9850 1500 education@heide.com.au

- Teachers are encouraged to visit Heide prior to a booked school visit (complimentary ticket available) to familiarise themselves with the exhibitions and facilities.
- Heide is committed to ensuring its programs and activities are accessible to all. Schools recognised as having a low overall socio-economic profile on the Government School Performance Summary are eligible to apply for a reduced fee. Please contact Heide Education for more information.

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