

# Talking Art Library

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Frederick McCubbin (1855-197), *A Frosty Morning*, 1910, oil on canvas, 49.5 x 75.0cm. The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of Dr Samuel Arthur Ewing 1938 [1938.0014.000.000]

Harold Weaver Hawkins (1893-1977), *Another Day*, 1954, oil on composition board, 71.0 x 91.0cm, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Purchased 1954, [1954.0008.000.000]

J.J Hilder (1881-1916), *Children Playing*, c.1909-14, watercolour on paper, 20.4 x 20.4cm, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of Dr Samuel Arthur Ewing 1938 [1938.0044.000.000].

Inge King AM (1915-2016), *Sun Ribbon*, 1980-82, black painted steel, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of Mrs Eileen Fox in memory of her parents Ernest and Fannie Kaye 1983. [1982.0023.000.000]

Emanuel Philip Fox (1865 -1915), *Lamplight*, 1911, oil on canvas, 188.5 x 229.5cm, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of Mrs E. Phillips Fox 1939. [1939.0002.000.000]

Thea Proctor (1879 -1966), *The Bathers (Fan Design)*, c.1920s-1930s), watercolour on silk on card, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of Mrs Margaret Cutten, donated through the Australian Government's Taxation Incentives for the Arts Scheme, 1983. [1983.0112.000.000]

Jeffrey Smart (1921 – 2013), *Hindmarsh Tannery*, 1943, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 61.0cm, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of Sir John Medley 1950. [1950.0001.000.000]

*Lekythos* Marathon Group, Class of Athens 581, ceramic, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Classics and Archaeology Collection. John Hugh Sutton Memorial Bequest, 1929. [1931.0003.000.000]

John Brack (1920-1999), *The Queen*, 1988, oil on linen, 137.0 x 106.5cm, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of Helen Brack. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2012. [2012.0001.000.000]

# Frederick McCubbin, A Frosty Morning, 1910



Frederick McCubbin (1855-197), *A Frosty Morning*, 1910, oil on canvas, 49.5 x 75.0cm. The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of Dr Samuel Arthur Ewing 1938 [1938.0014.000.000]

Presented by Ada Coxall

You can read the transcript and bibliography for this episode below.

Welcome to the Talking Art Library, my name is Ada Coxall and in this episode I focus on an important figure within Australian art – Frederick McCubbin – and his 1910 painting ‘A frosty morning’, otherwise known as ‘Winter morning.’

You find yourself atop a hill in the early hours of morning, barely awake as you watch the land break with its slumber and embrace a new day. You take deep breaths of the sharply cool air; your nose feels numb as it picks up early morning scents of fresh air and vegetation, tinted with smoky undertones. Your feet crunch through the hardened shell of frost on the grass, you bounce up and down on the spot to mute the feeling of chill.

Frederick McCubbin places you in the perfect position to observe the hilly land extending into a distant blur of blue haze, the horizon barely visible. His astute eye captures the scene from the elevated gardens at Carlesberg in South Yarra, shaping the landscape first by the sloping, narrow field of the foreground, sliced by the Yarra River in the mid-ground. This juts out from the mid far right of the frame.

The river moves leftwards across the painting, only to curve sharply to the right around a protruding bank slightly to the left of mid-frame. The loss of the river around the bend implies a necessary progress further than the eye can see, and shifts attention gradually into the distance. The running water implies movement, thus providing the painting with a life extending beyond the brushstrokes of paint. As if following the path of the water, the eye is led into the very background of the painting, where the landscape loses its definition due to the industrial mist cloaking the distant suburbs of Burnley and Richmond. An extended hill formation in the far distance is faintly disclosed. This horizon line separates the sky at the top third of the painting from the land. The distant rush of the river is heard as it travels across the land; birds sound their wake up calls.

Undulating hills traverse the mid-third of the painting, with the final top third dedicated to the smudged blue and white sky. Sky merges with terrain, as clouds become mist, cloaking the far distant land formations with a dream-like veil. McCubbin's use of subtly cool colour and gentle brushstroke place the viewer in a trance as they gaze across the hazy land, as if having just woken from slumber and attempting to shake off the last vestiges of a dream. Though blurred, the surface of the painting emanates an inner light. McCubbin sacrifices detail for feeling, revealing his painterly roots in impressionism, characteristic of an art movement he helped birth within Australia, 'The Heidelberg School.'

Together with other notable painters of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – such as Arthur Streeton and Tom Roberts – McCubbin attempted to diverge from tendencies to bend the Australian landscape into a European model of representation, instead focusing on astute observations of light. Importantly, these observations were often made and quickly executed on canvas 'en plein air', out in the open where painter and painting were subject to the surrounding elements.

McCubbin's gentle but determined thick strokes of paint create the solid forms of two dwellings, one off to the left in the background, and another to the far right of the foreground. This indication of humanity on an otherwise unaffected landscape culminates in the huddled forms of McCubbin's two children, Hugh and Sydney, and their dog Paddy portrayed in the direct foreground of the painting. They are positioned with their backs to the sprawling landscape behind them, their barely distinguishable faces directed down. Their mumbled conversations merge with the sounds of nature, contributing to the symphony that is the countryside in the early hours. Although they stand out due to their close foregrounding, McCubbin's soft brushstrokes merge them to their environment, inciting connection with the land as opposed to difference.

An overall feeling of peace overcomes those that experience McCubbin's 'A frosty morning', a landscape depicted in the infancy of day brings a freshness and crispness, realized in the cool blue hues of the paint, mixed with the paintings intrinsic softness. You feel invigorated, with new felt hope and expectation; with a new day comes new possibilities.

Thank you for listening to this episode of the Talking Art Library. It was researched, written and presented by Ada Coxall a Bachelor of Arts student studying Art History at the University of Melbourne.

The Talking Art Library is an initiative of the Ian Potter Museum of Art, with generous support from the Chancellery's Learning and Teaching Initiatives Grants.

Music: *The Queen*, 2016, composed by Julia Potter, music composition student at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Performers: Sam Ramirez on Harp, Tom D'Ath on Clarinet, Andrew Groch on Flute, Maxim Shenko on Violin, and Danna Yun on Cello.

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations, traditional owners of the land where this podcast was produced.

# Harold Weaver Hawkins, *Another Day*, 1954



Harold Weaver Hawkins (1893-1977), *Another Day*, 1954, oil on composition board, 71.0 x 91.0cm, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Purchased 1954, [1954.0008.000.000]

Presented by Katja Wagner.

You can read the transcript and bibliography for this episode below.

Hello and welcome to this episode of the Talking Art Library. My name is Katja Wagner and I'll be discussing *Another Day* painted in 1954 by Harold Weaver Hawkins, known as Weaver Hawkins in Australia.

*Another Day* is an oil painting on composition board and its width is around the distance from your fingers to your shoulder. As the monotonous, repetitious connotations of its title, *Another Day*, immediately establish, central to this work is the rhythm and pattern of quotidian human existence, expressed in the interlocking chain of shapes and forms which it encapsulates – hats, hands, newspapers; hats, hands, newspapers; hats, hands and newspapers... Like an earlier Hawkins' oil painting entitled, *Morning underground*, 1922, set amongst the bustle of Londoners commuting on the tube, this piece is presumably a snapshot from a morning train carrying an army of soulless city workers to their offices, attempting to drown out the prospect of *Another Day* by consuming wads of newspaper text. Evidently, even twenty-two years after *Morning underground*, Hawkins felt the acuteness of human captivity within the consumerist machine. *Another Day* truly is just *another day* in the capitalist calendar, whether it be tomorrow or in two decades' time – the monotony rolls on. In the words of Shakespeare's Macbeth: 'Tomorrow, tomorrow and tomorrow, creeps this petty pace from day to day, to the last syllable of recorded time...'

Captured from an oblique birds-eye angle (as though from a modern-day security camera), the viewer looks down upon a stylised cluster of anonymously neutral men's hats (ranging from short-brimmed Homburgs with their pinched crowns to tweed caps) scattered across the canvas. Poised wing-like between the hats are white and grey broadsheet newspapers with no words distinguishable. These wordless plains perhaps indicate the humdrum changelessness of news which runs parallel to the humdrum changelessness of train, work, sleep, or "métro, boulot, dodo" as the French anti-capitalist campaigners of the 1960s protested, with some

irony of assonance. Amongst these newspapers, the viewer captures glimpses of stylised hands, a generically brown skin-colour with generically uniform fingers, which look rather similar to 1950s and '60s children's cartoons and picture books. Every now and then a half-moon pair of eyes, formed by a flick of brown underlined in black, float alien-like under the hats, on faceless surfaces, the direction of their gaze unknown. Each of these shapes and forms are squeezed into the picture plain as though mimetic of the compressed train compartment. The figures of the commuters are outlined in black, the outer edges fringed in a thicker line – mostly black, sometimes rusty-brown, white or forest-green, whose fuzzy width has the texture of a thick-edged crayon. There is clearly something crude in all this mundanity.

Harold Frederick Weaver Hawkins was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> August 1893 into a progressive though unhappy, London household. Hawkins' architect father supported his interest in art, taking him on drawing expeditions, arranging extra art tuition and encouraging surgeons not to amputate his arms after returning from the trenches of WWI. Hawkins received a thorough education, cultivating and then honing his artistic competence at the various schools and colleges he attended in addition to his exposure to the cutting edge exhibitions and art life of turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe. However, when Britain declared war on Germany on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914 it was not only Hawkins' art historical and technical training that was disrupted. His youth was snatched away, his arms and hands shot through and his optimism and naivety exchanged with a more sober paradigm deeply rooted in a pacifist hatred of war and all other thieves of humanity. Like many others of his generation, with the call to arms, Hawkins was eager to exercise his youthful and imperial invincibility, only to be mutilated at the Battle of the Somme, the bloodiest 12 hours in British military history to that point, where Hawkins suffered multiple shots to his shoulders and arms. Over the next few years Hawkins endured twenty excruciating operations in France and then England. Whilst Hawkins did retain his arms, his shoulders, wrists and fingers were badly damaged, his elbows were removed and his dominant right hand permanently crippled. After some time painting by holding a brush in his mouth he began building up the control of his left hand.

Indeed, the war proved to be painfully formative in the forging of Hawkins' identity as an artist, resilient beyond the capacity of most in his battle to retain his ability to paint, draw and print, and against the world who wouldn't cease to cast him, as Hawkins the "crippled artist". Indeed, for a short time he signed his paintings with 'Raokin' (an Italian's interpretation of 'Hawkins') rather than his initials HWH so as to distance himself from this reading of his identity. Furthermore, the war opened his eyes permanently to the destructive, self-deceiving folly of warfare, which later extended to a hatred of atomic weapons, consumerism, and other systems of oppression.

The Hawkins arrived in Australia in March 1935, eventually settling on a property in Mona Vale where they had a kitchen garden, animals, a modest house and a nearby garage where Weaver Hawkins would plan and create. Hawkins had to be flexible with media and materials, supporting his practice and his family on his modest English WWI disability pension, weakened further by the shortages of the Great Depression and then the Second World War. He sometimes reverted to painting on composition board (as is the case with this piece), or even watercolour.

Present in *Another Day*, is a Post-Impressionist or Cubist perspective and means of expression in its reductive, linear form and colour. He is often viewed as a veteran Vorticist. Vorticism was a British avant-garde art movement originating just before the First World War which combined elements of Cubism, Expressionism and Futurism in sharply geometric and often diagonally angled forms. However, in reality Hawkins didn't adhere to Vorticist rhetoric, viewing himself as a painter existing in his own parallel movement of intellectual provocation and visual dynamism through streamlined form and symbolic colour. The thick outlines present around newspapers, hats and hands in *Another day* were inspired by Van Gogh's *L'Herbage aux Papillons*, 1890, which he had studied at the Tate Gallery in London, amazed by the manner in which Van Gogh's butterflies projected forward from the composition as a result of their black outlines. His bold sense of colour ripened under the Mediterranean sun during his time in France. In addition, the "arabesque" or "serpentine" curved line of the newspapers clutched by the disembodied hands appear like swooping seagulls, recalling the English Rococo painter and engraver William Hogarth, after whom Hawkins was nick-named by his peers at school. Indeed, for his lack of adherence to the aesthetic styles and fashions of the time, Hawkins was a generally unpopular artist in Australia, despite being well respected for his lectures, writing and active involvement in art societies.

Similarly characteristic to Hawkins' work is a symbolic colour palette which offers an interpretive representation rather than a photographic portrayal of his subject. Accordingly, in *Another Day*, the muddiness of the colours conveys a trudging weariness where not only shape and form but also colour merges and blends in an inescapable sea of similitude. The patchworked colours of the newspapers continue this highly controlled chromatic display, with an almost stylised shading not rounded and seamlessly incremental, but rather, composed of angular wedges of white, grey or grey-brown which jut into each other like the newspapers themselves and the human automatons who hold and read them.

In addition, the starkly reduced nature of form and colour in this painting theoretically simmers down the soup of complicated human existence into a concentrated, legible essence. This was characteristic of Hawkins, who was always eager to discover the source of a matter, whether this be the construction of objects and machines, or more philosophical and theological questions. Similarly, *Another Day* also portrays the way in which Hawkins built, or constructed architectonic compositions (influenced by the processes and works of his father) which united not only visual elements but also events and ideas so as to address contemporary issues. Hawkins sought to comment on the great dichotomy of the twentieth century: on one hand the massive technological progress, and on the other the dehumanising forces of mechanisation and wartime mass destruction. Indeed, some critics of his time rebuked him for being overly didactic, theoretical and intellectual rather than simply expressing a painterly adoration for his medium and trade. Nevertheless, the retrospectives which occurred throughout the 1970s and '80s, organised as he became ill and eventually unable to paint preceding his death in 1977, praised Weaver Hawkins for his vision, strength and moral conscience. It was as though up until that point the public and critics hadn't really looked, hadn't really allowed themselves to be consumed by the unquenchable fires which fuelled the dynamic messages taking visual and verbal form on his canvases, boards and pages.

Like Shakespeare in Macbeth's tormentingly desperate *Tomorrow* soliloquy, Hawkins' *Another day* presents the wearisomeness of modern existence in all its dullness, confusion and claustrophobia. However, Hawkins' message doesn't stop there. He forges this scene so as to challenge the viewer and consequently spark some change – Hawkins' artistic communication was paramount to his identity, battling against everything which might prevent him from artistic expression with remarkable resilience. It could be said that Hawkins' works encourage the same combative spirit in his viewer. In *Another Day* he has given us the diagnosis of a waning society, and it is up to us to carry out the remedy, to halt the monotony and bring back the landscape of meaning.

This episode of the Talking Art Library was researched, written and presented by Katja Wagner, Bachelor of Environments student at the University of Melbourne. You can find a bibliography for this episode in the podcast's show notes or transcript. The Talking Art Library is an initiative of the Ian Potter Museum of Art, with generous support from the Chancellery's Learning and Teaching Initiatives Grants.

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Music: *The Queen*, 2016, composed by Julia Potter, music composition student at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Performers: Sam Ramirez on Harp, Tom D'Ath on Clarinet, Andrew Groch on Flute, Maxim Shenko on Violin, and Danna Yun on Cello.

## J.J. Hilder, *Children Playing*, c.1909-14.



J.J. Hilder (1881-1916), *Children Playing*, c.1909-14, watercolour on paper, 20.4 x 20.4cm, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of Dr Samuel Arthur Ewing 1938 [1938.0044.000.000].

Presented by Katja Wagner.

You can read the transcript and bibliography for this episode below.

Hello and welcome to this episode of the Talking Art Library. My name is Katja Wagner and I'll be discussing Jesse Jewhurst Hilder's *Children Playing*, painted around 1909 to 1914. It is a watercolour on paper and its length and width are both similar to the distance between your elbow and wrist. *Children Playing* belongs to the collection of surgeon and University of Melbourne alumnus Dr Samuel Arthur Ewing whose gift of 56 paintings donated in 1938, was one of the earliest and most significant donations to the University of Melbourne's Art Collection.

The painting's title, *Children Playing*, reveals the core subject matter of this gentle watercolour. The work is a square in shape and is painted upon a soft nut-coloured paper with a noticeably toothed texture. One could say that *Children Playing* is divided into four horizontal bands. The highest is a pale blue wash of a distant cloudless sky, with the soothing horizontal movement of barely visible brushstrokes. The band below this, the mid-ground, is the most animated component of the painting, backed by a slither of blue sea so subtle that it melts away into the background. In the next band, slightly off-centre, are a cluster of seven children, similarly ephemerally represented, with only hats, a few cotton shirts and rolled up trousers depicted. Other details appear as though absorbed into the silky wash of sand beneath. The children appear to be skipping around in an anti-clockwise circle, their hands joined perhaps in a round of Ring Around the Rosie. Their facial expressions are indistinguishable, obscured by their large brimmed hats and rapid motion. However, one can easily imagine the pure excitement they would have radiated. The lowest band, what could be seen as the foreground, continues the suggestion of sand commenced in the mid-ground, the thin wash of paint bleeding into the paper surface to create a motely effect, as though wind-swept.

Indeed, it is as though the painting is the squinted vision of a holiday-maker upon a delightful summer afternoon, not quite clear but completely happy. To the lower right is Hilder's signature, 'J. J. Hilder', in modest grey capitals.

Jesse Jewhurst Hilder was born in 1881 in Toowoomba, Queensland, the ninth of ten children to immigrant parents, his father a former Sussex engine driver and his mother an Indian-born Irishwoman. By the time his family had moved to Brisbane in 1890, Hilder had developed an affection for drawing and painting and was already being encouraged by various mentors. However, despite his talent and artistic inclination, between 1898 and 1909 he worked as a bank clerk at multiple branches throughout New South Wales. Nevertheless, it was during this time that he was further encouraged as a water colourist and enrolled in evening classes at the Julian Ashton Art School where he worked under pseudonym, fearful that the bank (with their conservative notions of respectability) would disapprove of his art-making. He also became a frequent visitor at the National Art Gallery of New South Wales, drawn by the work of contemporaries Arthur Streeton, Sydney Long and J. W. Tristram. A gentle, reclining personality, the subtlety of many of these artists' works may have appealed to his own sensitivity, a quality poignant in the delicate washes of *Children Playing*, which like the lapping of the tide upon a smooth square of sand, appears only in momentary suspension.

Indeed, like the illusive vision this watercolour presents, Jesse Jewhurst Hilder's life was similarly fleeting. In 1906 Hilder discovered that he had tuberculosis and after this point was forced to take large swathes of time off from his clerical duties. Nevertheless, during this time his art practice flourished, being praised as a genius by Arthur Streeton after a 1907 exhibition which saw all twenty-one of watercolours exhibited, sold. In 1909 he was forced to resign permanently from his position at the bank, strained by his health and encouraged by his new wife Phyllis to dedicate himself to his artwork fulltime. Despite a slow start, from mid-1911 Hilder was able to sustain himself and his family with his watercolour painting as their sole source of income, along with the help of Sydney art dealer Adolf Albers and several successful exhibitions. However, by 1915 the fatal nature of his illness became all too evident and Hilder passed away in 1916 at the age of just 34. *Children Playing* was lent by Dr Ewing to a memorial exhibition of Hilder's work held in New South Wales, along with the other Hilder watercolour in his collection, *The bridge*.

Despite the hardships which beset Hilder's life, *Children Playing* exemplifies the blissful tranquillity present in all of his work. There is a sense of physical and spiritual release in the quotidian scenes he depicts, a memorandum to the beauty of his surrounds which softened the strain of frequent impoverishment and illness. Indeed, the mellow tones of this placid watercolour very much evoke a brief, though conscientiously lived life, its compassionate vulnerability blending with the wash of sand, sea, sky and of course, the laughter of *Children Playing*. As the viewer pauses to gaze at this gentle observation, one cannot help but feel subsumed in the sweet warmth of a summer afternoon by the sea, the cool sand spreading out beneath the viewer's eyes, the marbling sky receding into a spiritual infinity, and the chatter and frolic of *Children Playing* darting in the transient though blissful completeness of the present moment, forever remembered by Hilder's brush, like a delicate insect suffused in amber.

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## Inge King, Sun Ribbon, 1980-82.



Inge King AM (1915-2016), *Sun Ribbon*, 1980-82, black painted steel, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of Mrs Eileen Fox in memory of her parents Ernest and Fannie Kaye 1983. [1982.0023.000.000]

Presented by Meg Sheehan.

You can read the transcript and bibliography for this episode below.

Hello and welcome. You're listening to the Talking Art Library. My name's Meg Sheehan and in this episode, you'll be hearing about Inge King's sculpture, Sun Ribbon, made between 1980 and 1982.

We're on campus at the University of Melbourne, walking through Union Lawn which sits between Union House and the Melbourne School of Design. Union Lawn is also known, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, as concrete lawns. Concrete pavers make up nearly half of this open space, stretching from one building to the other. On a sunny day it's bright and warm, and there's plenty of shade under the trees on the lush lawn near the Baldwin Spencer building at the north edge of the space.

Today there's a food market on the concrete square. Students and staff are milling about chatting and waiting for their hot lunches or fresh juices. On either side of the paved area, wide raised garden beds are covered in cool grass. Trees at the edges of these beds provide shade to the people on their lunch breaks.

If you're coming from Union House, we'll turn to the bed on the left hand side; if you're coming from the School of Design or Swanston St, it's the garden bed to your right. There are groups of students here sitting in circles, and two people sit on the stone edge of the bed eating dumplings from paper plates.

In the middle of this raised lawn is what we've come to see: Inge King's sculpture, Sun Ribbon. The sculpture is made up of curving planes of black painted steel. In the centre of the sculpture are two flat disks standing on their ends. They are empty in

the middle like rings. Standing up like this they are about ten feet tall – almost twice as tall as some people. They aren't standing perfectly straight. They are almost touching at the base, slightly off-centre, and they lean away from each other so that there's a gap between them of about a metre – just over an arm's length – at the top. There are two more pieces to the sculpture – both wide, flat planes of steel. But they don't seem rigid like you might expect a sheet of steel to be. The sculptor has bent and curved them to look like ribbon.

To one side of the rings, this ribbon of steel takes on a hairpin shape. About a metre at the end has been curved over on itself, with the bent edge facing in towards the rings, and the other end dropping almost vertically to the ground. Here it curves again, forming a low incline that rushes up over the base of the two rings, and then drops down again toward the concrete slab the sculpture sits on.

From the top of this last curve of steel ribbon, which seems to clasp the two giant rings together, the second sheet of steel begins to rise vertically. It quickly sweeps down to meet the concrete where it curves gently upwards towards a final, low undulation. This final twist of the steel is two-fold – one corner of the sheet points back downwards, hovering just above the ground, and the other is bent back towards the centre like a dog-eared page in a book.

The sculptor of Sun Ribbon, Inge King, said of her work in the 1980s, when this sculpture was made, that she wanted 'to create a feeling of flight which almost denies the gravitational pressure of the material'. It's an effect she has certainly achieved in the graceful sweeps and curves of Sun Ribbon's steel planes.

Inge King was a German. She was born Ingebord Neufeld in Berlin in 1926. She was Jewish, and at the start of the Second World War she left her art school in Berlin and emigrated to London, and later Glasgow, to study sculpture. In 1947 she met Grahame King, a young Australian printmaker, while they were both studying and working at Abbey Art Centre in the south of England. The pair married and settled in Melbourne, where they built a home and studio in Warrandyte. They lived and worked there for the rest of their lives.

Inge's sculpture evolved over her career, and by the early 1980s, when Sun Ribbon was created, she was committed to making large-scale public works for Australian land and cityscapes. Perhaps the most famous of these is Forward Surge, which stretches between the National Gallery of Victoria and the Arts Centre on St Kilda Rd. In 1982 King had her first solo show, held at the University of Melbourne, and Sun Ribbon was unveiled on Union Law, where it remains today.

We've talked about the ribbons of steel King used for this work – but what about the Sun? The central rings can be seen as a reference to the central spherical star that our solar system hinges on; but it also has a much more grounded meaning for generations of university students who have enjoyed the sculpture. There are two places – one on either side of the rings, where the ribbons of steel curve against the ground, creating the perfect spot for a weary student to take a break in the sunshine. The black painted steel soaks up and retains the sun's heat.

Today, in one curve, two students show each other text messages and their giggles mingle the sounds of cooking food, orders being shouted from stalls, and music drifting from the student union tent at the edge of our grassy patch. In the other curve

a young couple drape their arms around each other and nap in the sculpture's warmth. King once said, 'I see my work in the Australian landscape or in the Australian cityscape, if you like. With a public sculpture you have to be aware that people use it – I feel people should use it. And the sculptures have to be designed accordingly.' We can only assume that Inge would have approved of our giggling and napping students.

King worked into her nineties, and in April 2016 she passed away at one hundred years old. She left us a rich legacy. Her sculptures enliven public spaces in cities and towns across the country. They have become icons on Australian streets, highways, garden squares, and university campuses.

Please feel welcome to venture on campus to enjoy Sun Ribbon. Enter the University from Swanston St at Gate 3. Walk the short distance down Masson Road, and go past or through the Melbourne School of Design to get to Union Lawn. If you'd like to touch or sit on the sculpture, please remember that it's on a raised bed about the height of a seat.

This episode of the Talking Art Library was researched, written and presented by Meg Sheehan, Masters of Art Curatorship student at the University of Melbourne, and Research Assistant at the Ian Potter Museum of Art.

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# Emanuel Philip Fox, *Lamplight*, 1911



Emanuel Philip Fox (1865 -1915), *Lamplight*, 1911, oil on canvas, 188.5 x 229.5cm, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of Mrs E. Phillips Fox 1939. [1939.0002.000.000]

Presented by Photius Hadji.

You can read the transcript and bibliography for this episode below.

Hello and welcome to this episode of the Talking Art Library. My name is Photius Hadji and I'll be discussing Emanuel Philip Fox's painting *Lamplight* 1911.

Fox was born in 1865 in Melbourne. He studied art and painting in the National Gallery School, along other artists including Fredrick McCubbin and John Longstaff. Following the completion of his studies, he travelled to Paris where he studied under Jean-Léon Gérôme; a master of Academicism and Orientalist painting. Fox's works were exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1890 having gained great recognition during his time at the École des Beaux-Arts – that is the French National School of Fine Art. Upon returning to Australia, Fox began teaching the styles and techniques which he had learnt in Paris. He became a member of the Heidelberg School of Australian Impressionists, and specialised in landscapes before travelling again to Europe. There he continued to paint and exhibit art in England and France. Returning again to Australia in 1913, Fox focused upon painting the simple beauties of everyday life, and through the application of impressionist and Heidelberg inspired techniques, developed a recognition for his paintings of women in candid and natural settings. He emphasised their femininity through the gentle application of pale colours, favouring tonality of light and colour.

The painting 'Lamplight' is an example, which highlights these qualities. It depicts a languid scene, in which three women sit together in a drawing room, in the privacy of each other's company. On the far left of the composition, a woman in a dark brown

and patterned nightgown reclines against a pink cushion whilst sitting on a canapé or sofa. The canapé is upholstered with a blue-grey fabric, and a yellow cushion is also candidly placed next to her. The woman holds an open book in her lap, whilst gazing over to her companions. She has stopped reading to make conversation. Around her shoulders is a blue shawl, whose colour complements the fabric of the canapé.

Beside her is a table covered with a white lace cloth. Upon it sits a vase of soft pink flowers, whose colours are similar to that of the cushion. The second woman, who is standing, and is turned away from us, pours herself a cup of tea from the tea tray on the table. She is wearing a white dress with brown trimming. A brown-spotted cat sits on the floor beside the woman and stares up at her longingly expecting a treat. The third woman, who sits to the right of the composition, and slightly behind the second woman, also wears a nightgown. It is white and decorated with small pink flowers; she also has a blue shawl over her shoulders and appears to be speaking with the second woman who is pouring the tea. She is also sitting on a canapé. The scene is broken up into two sections. To the left, the woman with the book sits in the warmth of a lamp's light, which glows from beyond the canvas, and creates a yellow lambency around her and upon the wall. The right side is framed by a window, in front of which is placed the table. The window, which is adorned with sheer white lace curtains, lets in the evening darkness, and creates a cooler blue juxtaposition to the yellow. The pale blue evening light frames the woman, who is pouring the tea, and it distinguishes her from the other two, perhaps because she is the only one standing.

There is a contrast between the warmth and coolness of the two sections: there is the pale blue light from the window, and the glow of the lamp which creates shadows in the room, adding a feeling of homely warmth to the painting. This reflects the intimacy and increases the femininity of the painting, which is a fundamental aspect of many of Fox' works. This heightens the intimacy of the painting and emphasises the comfort of the women in their surrounds, reflecting an Edwardian ideal of domestic femininity.

This episode of the Talking Art Library was researched, written and presented by Photius Hadji, Master of Art Curatorship at the University of Melbourne. You can find a bibliography for this episode in the podcast's show notes or transcript. The Talking Art Library is an initiative of the Ian Potter Museum of Art, with generous support from the Chancellery's Learning and Teaching Initiatives Grants.

Music: *The Queen*, 2016, composed by Julia Potter, music composition student at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Performers: Sam Ramirez on Harp, Tom D'Ath on Clarinet, Andrew Groch on Flute, Maxim Shenko on Violin, and Danna Yun on Cello.

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations, traditional owners of the land where this podcast was produced.

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# Thea Proctor, *The Bathers* (fan design), c.1920s



Thea Proctor (1879 -1966), *The Bathers (Fan Design)*, c.1920s-1930s), watercolour on silk on card, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of Mrs Margaret Cutten, donated through the Australian Government's Taxation Incentives for the Arts Scheme, 1983. [1983.0112.000.000]

Presented by Meg Sheehan

Welcome to the Talking Art Library, my name is Meg Sheehan, and in this episode of the podcast I'll be talking about Thea Proctor's 'The Bathers', made circa 1920-30. *The Bathers* is painted with watercolour paint on silk, which has been mounted on card and has a slightly unusual half-moon shape – something like a donut that has been cut in half. The outer curve of the donut makes the upper edge of the painting.

*The Bathers* is this unusual shape because it was a design for a fan, which fashionable ladies in the 1920s would carry with them to parties, the theatre, or other social events. When the fan was extended, it would be the shape we find in Thea Proctor's design. It measures 52 centimetres in diameter, or about the breadth of a person's shoulders, allowing a woman to shield her face from prying eyes, or perhaps create some privacy to gossip with a friend or flirt with a lover. On the fan we see two nude women and a nude cherub-like child, enjoying themselves in a garden by a body of water, perhaps a lake. At the very base of the design, Proctor has created a horizontal grassy area of a couple of centimetres, using several washes of green paint. Deep green indicates the shady areas under the trees at either edge of the design, and this fades to a lighter green and finally a yellow wash towards the bottom of the fan. Beyond the grassy area, the lake or sea is indicated by an indigo wash that starts with a deep blue about halfway up the design, and fades as it reaches the shore.

At the leftmost bottom corner of the fan there is a low bush of pale pink flowers, balanced in the right corner by a soft yellow bush about the same size. At the edge of the grassy area on the left, a tree stretches upwards to the outer curve of the design, and inwards towards the centre. Proctor has used quick sketchy brushstrokes to indicate the full foliage of the tree. These brushstrokes also give the foliage a sense of movement and energy, as though there might be a slight breeze.

In front of this tree is one of the nude women. She is standing on a red striped blanket or towel. She places most of her weight on her right foot, on our left as we look at the painting, while she lifts her left foot so that only her toes touch the blanket. The woman has raised both arms as she pulls a white cloth over her head, perhaps to dry her yellow hair after a dip in the lake. Her right arm is crooked behind her head, holding the cloth, while her left arm, on our right, is extended towards the centre of the fan, mimicking the movement of the tree's branches. It's a graceful, dancer-like pose.

The extension of the woman's arm guides the gaze across the design to the right hand side of the fan. Here, the second woman is seated on a deep green grassy step. The woman's face and torso are turned away from us. Her right leg is gently extended to rest on the grass, and she draws her left foot under her so that she can dry it with the red and blue striped towel she holds in her right hand. In her left hand she holds up what appears to be an orange, the colour of the round fruit matches her short cropped hair and that of the chubby toddler who reaches to take it from her. The toddler is standing on what might be a terrace on the lawn. Though Proctor has not clearly painted such a feature, she has indicated it by the differing positions of the woman and child and by including a tall stone vase overflowing with foliage and bright red flowers. The vase sits high on a stone pedestal just behind the cherub child, who casts a shadow over the left hand half of this platform. High above the woman and child, at the very top edge of the fan's curve, the lower leafy branch of a tree hangs into the scene, overlapping slightly with the vase of flowers. Silhouetted behind the vase and this branch are three tall narrow trees, and beyond them, the water.

The design is painted on a creamy pale silk. While most of the silk is filled in with watercolour washes, in painting the human figures Proctor has skilfully left some areas of the silk bare. This bare silk appears as a midtone of the figures' skin, and gives the flesh a pearly, bright quality.

Thea Proctor was born in 1879 in Armidale in northern New South Wales, and grew up in Sydney. She was well-known in her lifetime for her art, her writing in fashionable ladies magazines, her style-making opinions, and her flamboyant personality. In the 1920s, Proctor studied and worked in London, where she associated with other Australian artists living in the city, such as Arthur Streeton, Charles Conder, and George Lambert, with whom she shared a lifelong friendship. During this time she worked almost exclusively on fan designs, a decision which was influenced by Conder, who was also working in this format. Both artists, like many of their European, American, and Australian contemporaries, were interested in Japanese prints. In *The Bathers* we can see Japanese influence in the decorous arrangement of figures, in the cursory way in which landscape elements are indicated with just a few lines of coloured wash, and in details such as the overhanging branches of the tree.

Proctor exhibited her fans in London, where they were well received. When she returned to Australia in 1921, Proctor continued making fan designs, and also became known for her woodcut prints and magazine illustrations. The eminent Australian watercolourist, Hans Heysen, wrote in the foreword to a 1929 catalogue of her works that the remarkable quality of her line was only equalled in Australia by

George Lambert, and her position as a fan designer was unique. He writes, 'She has produced a delightful series of designs, exquisite in their rhythm and color pattern, and her achievement in this genre alone has won for her a very high position amongst the artists of Australia.'

Though Proctor's work was considered conservative by European standards, she was very modern in Australia. She was a strong advocate for modernism in Australian art, and often lectured on design. In one such lecture in Adelaide in 1929, she was reported as saying, 'an accurate drawing can be very dull, and have no aesthetic quality whatever. Artists who return from abroad often condemn modernist conceptions, and say that Australia is the only sane place in the world, so far as art is concerned. Sanity is, I think, another word for dullness. We need a new outlook on art in this country'.

Thea Proctor's *The Bathers* was gifted to the University of Melbourne by Mrs Margaret Cutten in 1983.

This episode of the Talking Art Library was researched, written and presented by Meg Sheehan, graduate student in the Masters of Art Curatorship program at the University of Melbourne, and Research Assistant at the Ian Potter Museum of Art. The Talking Art Library is an initiative of the Ian Potter Museum of Art, with generous support from the Chancellery's Learning and Teaching Initiatives Grants.

Music: *The Queen*, 2016, composed by Julia Potter, music composition student at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Performers: Sam Ramirez on Harp, Tom D'Ath on Clarinet, Andrew Groch on Flute, Maxim Shenko on Violin, and Danna Yun on Cello.

We would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations, the traditional owners of the land where this podcast was produced.

# Jeffrey Smart, Hindmarsh Tannery, 1943



Jeffrey Smart (1921 – 2013), *Hindmarsh Tannery*, 1943, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 61.0cm, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of Sir John Medley 1950. [1950.0001.000.000]

Presented by Katja Wagner

You can read the transcript and bibliography for this episode below.

Hello and welcome to this episode of the Talking Art Library. My name is Katja Wagner and I'll be discussing Jeffrey Smart's *Hindmarsh Tannery*, painted in 1943. It is an oil painting on canvas and its width is around the distance from your shoulder to your fingers and its height the distance from your shoulder to your wrist.

The central element of this piece, as the title suggests, is a tannery, a factory which facilitates the arduous process of treating skins and hides with tannic acid so that they become leather. The view is captured from a street corner under signature Jeffrey Smart weather conditions (stormy with brilliant golden light), the corner of the factory on axis with the street corner, its length extending obliquely down the left-hand side of the composition. On the far left, behind the factory, is a red brick chimney reaching above the upper limit of the canvas and tapering in circumference as it rises. The strip of road to the right of the painting and street corner is almost horizontally level, including in its panorama a street pole and a small tree with a bent trunk upon the footpath. On the far right of the painting, behind the main factory building, are a series of slanted, interlocking triangular and rectangular planes which form a brief roofscape, in addition to another cream-rendered façade, a corrugated iron fence and a smaller building or shed.

It is possible that this was an exercise in practicing geometric form and linear perspective, the volumes depicted being quite faithful to their volumetric equivalents like spheres, cubes or pyramids. However, simultaneously, this painting is also very much a documentation of a visual observation, given its visual proximity to the real streetscape. Interestingly, given Smart's later preference to collage observations across time and place, looking at an image of the tannery in 1907 from the same corner, this composition is quite truthful to how the Hindmarsh tannery appeared in the 1940s, excluding only the John Reid & Sons advertising signs high on the two predominant façades and a few extra windows on the left façade.

The colour palette of this work is muddied by industrial grime, but also augmented by the egg-yolk richness of the sunlight radiating from behind storm clouds. The factory itself is a browned buttercup yellow smeared with black and flaking away to reveal salty white undercoats and a crude tapestry of bricks which forms its masonry wall. Timber shutters and screens populate the window spaces and no door is visible. Similarly, no figures are illustrated. Perhaps Smart wanted to exclude all human presence, giving way to the mechanical and industrial. Perhaps he wanted to capture a majesty he perceived in this urban wasteland, an aura emanating from the structures themselves which gives them character and personality even without human activity. All the same, the dominance of the manmade in this painting is indisputable. The impasto thickness of the paint surface of *Hindmarsh Tannery* creates a certain industrial grit, the paint adopting the very quality of its urban subject. Furthermore, the blending of colour and overlaying of contrasting paint layers so that lower layers bleed through to the surface in a rusty tarnish, also echoes the coalescing of masonry and dilapidated render at the worn foot of the factory building. Even the blotched train of powdery clouds in the foreboding sky appear to emulate the form of bricks in their atmospheric surface. There is no signature on this painting, rather its frame has tacked onto it a piece of Perspex with 'Jeff Smart b. 1921 Australia' typed in black letters, 'HINDMARSH TANNERY' printed on another piece on the right-hand side. Intriguingly, the frame itself also has a rubbed back quality, traces of previous finishes revealing themselves wearily through a red-brown overcoat. Mimetic of the industrial surfaces within the painting, the frame communicates something similar, showcasing the hidden surfaces glimmering through whilst still capturing the industry and the imperfection.

Jeffrey Smart was born in 1921 in Adelaide to Isaac Smart, a prosperous property developer, and Emmeline Edson. In the early 1930s, however, with the devastation of the Great Depression, Smart's father's real estate business which previously was prolific in its converting of farms into beach resorts, went into liquidation and the family was forced to move into a small flat so that they could rent out their family home. Peering out of the window, Smart could observe tempestuous seascapes of city rooves in addition to distant hills. However, it was not only the quaint charm of the dilapidated buildings which sparked his interest (indeed, in his adolescence Smart dreamed of becoming an architect), but the metamorphic luminosity of the Adelaide light. Later he recounted "I might have driven past the same thing dozens, hundreds of times and then suddenly I'll see it caught in a certain way by the early morning or afternoon light and the whole thing is transformed."

The other tenant of Smart's work, the mechanics of composition, was crystallised for him when as an art student, he visited Dorrit Black's studio. Black, an earlier

Australian painter and printmaker born exactly thirty years before Smart in 1891, shared with the students her notes on dynamic symmetry which she had formulated whilst studying under French Cubists André Lhôte and Albert Gleizes in Paris who in turn placed great emphasis on the compositional geometry of French and Italian masters such as Poussin, Tinoretto, Veronese and Da Vinci. From this point, Smart began to see the artwork first and foremost as a constructed and highly engineered figment of artistic ingenuity. Later he reflected: "My pictures are completely synthetic, in that I move things around relentlessly, change the heights of buildings, the colours, to get the composition right." Indeed, whilst teaching at art school his students were unanimous in their appreciation of the centrality of composition in Smart's approach to painting.

Nineteen forty-three, the year this oil was painted by Smart, marks the time in which his critical and commercial success as an artist began to gain pace immensely in Australia, his work purchased by major national galleries and his first solo exhibition being held in 1944 in Melbourne, preceding his winning of the Royal South Australian Society of Arts' portrait prize in 1945.

From this point onwards, his planes of colour gradually became more and more pebble-smooth in texture and in solidity, his compositions composed of slabs of bold, opaque colour. Overtime he discarded fine texture and detail for a greater sparseness whose resulting crispness placed even greater emphasis on compositional structures, a more resolute simplicity and the importance of symbology. Furthermore, his subjects tended not to be singular impressions of particular localities, but rather compositions composed of a patchwork of sketched or remembered observations. He also often added figures in order to convey a sense of scale in the context of the overpowering urban jungle.

However, in this early painting, *Hindmarsh Tannery*, the urban focus and light filtered by the moody sky creating a contemplative solemnity are both very much characteristic of Smart's oeuvre, evidently seeds of his further development. Later he explained that "I need a dark sky for the composition, because pale blue at the top of a frame looks like nothing" and that "It's the light that counts; the light on objects can make them beautiful, even if they're unappealing in themselves." Indeed, the predominant difference between *Hindmarsh Tannery* and his later, more renowned work, is his early focus upon decaying industrial fabric, which he later lightened and brightened into the plastic perfection of synthetic urban contours and colours – bright green, hot pink, fire engine red, electric blue and incandescent yellow all featuring in his later palette, in contrast to the muted tones of *Hindmarsh Tannery*. This work was also painted prior to Smart's extensive international travel which was key to his practice as an artist up until his retirement in 2011 and subsequent death in 2013, invigorating holidays and excursions punctuating his life, the most part of which he spent at his Tuscan villa.

Undoubtedly *Hindmarsh Tannery* captures the compositional geometry Smart was so fascinated by as an artist, in some ways evidence of his declaration that "my only concern is putting the right shapes in the right colours in the right places. It is always geometry." Indeed, the painting he most revered is often said to be Piero della Francesca's *The flagellation of Christ*, a painting of 1455-1460, whose exactitude of perspective and volume, Smart exalted as nothing less than masterful, a reproduction of which he kept pinned to the wall of his studio in Tuscany.

The work of Jeffrey Smart captivates the viewer by illustrating the generic urban landscape in a luminous sun-glaze which renders beautiful the industrial austerity it frames. In this way, whilst a common reading of his paintings is that of disdain towards a technologically alienating society whose binding characteristic is ominous desolation, it would stand to reason that Smart's paintings are rather, invigorating portrayals of what would usually appear to be mundane urban wastelands – an optimistic gesture towards a hopeful future rather than a cynical damnation of past industrialising. Moreover, perhaps this is evidence of the joy of painting Smart experienced as an artist – “I love painting more than anything else, and I love painting things I consider beautiful” he said one occasion, on another that the object of painting is “often to crystallise moments of ecstasy, but that’s also an excuse in another sense because the actual doing, the making of the picture is such a pleasure. I’m just like an old carpenter who loves making cabinets.”

Hence, whilst *Hindmarsh Tannery* focuses more on the humanising subtlety of urban dilapidation as opposed to his later concentration on dynamic symbols of modernity, this piece still very much glimmers with the essence of Smart's oeuvre. That is, through the transformative prism of *Hindmarsh Tannery's* drama of light, colour and sky, this work instils within the heart of the viewer a sense of Smart's underlying adoration of the urban landscape, its hidden magnificence which in Smart's eyes, can captivate more than as it can isolate, allure more than it can dwarf. Indeed, Smart reminds us (no matter how unsettlingly at moments) of what it means to find splendour in the unexpected and inspiration in what seconds before seemed tediously familiar.

This episode of the Talking Art Library was researched, written and presented by Katja Wagner, Bachelor of Environments student at the University of Melbourne. You can find a bibliography for this episode in the podcast's show notes or transcript.

The Talking Art Library is an initiative of the Ian Potter Museum of Art, with generous support from the Chancellery's Learning and Teaching Initiatives Grants.

Music: *The Queen*, 2016, composed by Julia Potter, music composition student at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Performers: Sam Ramirez on Harp, Tom D'Ath on Clarinet, Andrew Groch on Flute, Maxim Shenko on Violin, and Danna Yun on Cello.

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations, traditional owners of the land where this podcast was produced.

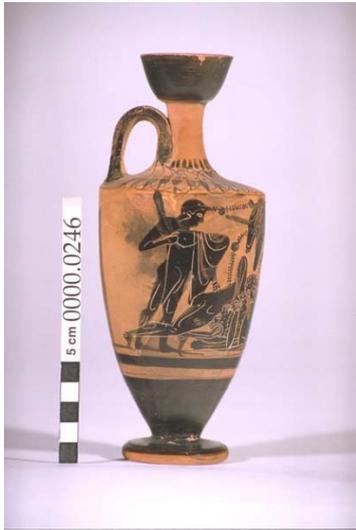
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# Attic Black figure Lekythos, 500 to 490 BCE



*Lekythos* Marathon Group, Class of Athens 581, ceramic, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Classics and Archaeology Collection. John Hugh Sutton Memorial Bequest, 1929. [1931.0003.000.000]

Presented by Sakina Nomanbhoy

You can read the transcript and bibliography for this episode below.

Hello and welcome to this episode of the Talking Art Library. My name is Sakina and I'll be discussing the Marathon group's Attic Black figure Lekythos, which is made in Greece in about 500 to 490 BCE.

This artefact is known as a lekythos and was used as a funerary object. It's basic structure resembles that of a small modern day vase. It has a height of 20.5 cm, which is roughly equivalent to the distance from your middle finger till the halfway point of your forearm. The vessel is made up of several parts: from the top these are the mouth, the neck, the body, and the base. The cup shaped mouth occupies the top most part of the vessel, and is about the size and shape of a small ramekin. This is succeeded by a much narrower neck that slopes into the shoulders to meet the body. A concaved shaped handle meets the neck at its center and extends to the edge of the shoulders, creating a small arch. The shoulders are nearly flat and its edges form the starting point of its body, which makes up three quarters of the lekythos. The body tapers steadily to the foot, characterized by a small 5cm wide disk comparable to the diameter of a wine glass' base.

The lekythos is painted with narrative illustrations. The body of the vessel narrates Herakles' defeat of the Nemean lion. We see the Greek demi-god and the lion locked in battle. The lion has lunged underneath Herakles who is stretched across the beast in a diagonal line across the composition, his feet at the bottom left and his head at the centre of the scene. His chin is concealed behind the lion's mane but his round eyes and sharp nose are visible. Though the bushiness of his hair obscures his neck, his round earlobes successfully fend off the prominence of both the lion's

mane and Herakles' hair. Herakles' muscular arms snake around the lion's neck, squeezing tightly in an attempt to throttle it. The lion's right hind leg comes up aggressively in retaliation, trying to kick Herakles in the face but it misses marginally, landing inches away from the target. The legendary hero's brute strength bests the lion's. The creature's defeat is evident in the lion's gaping mouth and the limp tongue hanging from it.

As Heracles battles the lion, Iolaos, Herakles' nephew, stands to the left of the composition, just behind Herakles' calf muscles. He is carrying Herakles' famed club on his right shoulder and his left shoulder is draped with a cloak that does not touch the ground. Though Iolaos' features are not as discernable as Herakles', the direction of his head indicates that his gaze is fixed upon the battle happening to his right. Following his gaze, past the struggling forms of Herakles and the lion, there is a tall thin rock that counter-balances the figure of Iolaos. As Iolaos frames the left side of the composition, this rock of similar height and size frames the right side. Above the figures there are branches with double dotted leaves on which hang a second club, a bow and a quiver. All of which are attributes of the demi-god Herakles.

The foliage coupled with a thin black horizontal line serves as the ceiling of the composition, denoting the end of the artifact's body and the start of its shoulders. The line runs around the circumference of the vessel's shoulders. This is an upward movement away from the narrative composition and into the decorative segments found on the shoulders and neck of the lekythos. The shoulder of the vessel is decorated with conjoined lotus buds with each bud having a single black dot above it. Above the shoulder of the lekythos, the base of the neck is decorated with tiny tongue-like images after which comes an expanse of warm pink-orange Attic ceramic that reaches the deep painted black of the lekythos' mouth.

The artist has created the central figures and natural motifs on the artifact by first painting silhouette-like shapes in black paint. Then, they have used a sharp point to incise the details of faces, clothing, lion and foliage. The black figures contrast greatly against the warm pink-orange Attic clay. The stark contrast between the two main colours – the clay and the black paint – creates clear and definite figures and forms. These differing colours also aid in dividing the vessel, separating the black mouth from the pink-orange neck and the pink-orange shoulder from the black handle. Underneath the composition, thick black lines encircle the body of the lekythos as it tapers down towards the jet-black disk at the base.

Herakles' defeat of the Nemean Lion was the first of his 12 labors, which was assigned to him by the king of Argolis, Eurystheus. Eurystheus was worried about Herakles' growing power and hoped that the impossibility of the labors would kill Herakles, allowing him to maintain control over his city. The first labor aptly illustrated the impossibility of the tasks as the lion was described as an enormous beast, which could not be wounded by iron, bronze or stone. Thus, the human hand was the only possible weapon, which was employed by Herakles as observed on the body of the lekythos. The inclusion of the thin rock on the right most side of the composition accurately depicts the location of his victory, a cleft situated in the mountain Tretus.

Such depictions of heroic feats were common between 500 to 490 BCE as these years saw the introduction of the Panathenaic games, recitals of poetry and drama festivals. These cultural events would have led to the oral presentation of heroic epics, which provided craftsmen with novel ideas and images for their art. This in turn resulted in an increase in demand for heroic scenes that communicated the destruction of monsters such as Herakles' triumph over the Nemean lion.

This episode of the Talking Art Library was researched, written and presented by Sakina Nomanbhoy, Bachelor of Arts student at the University of Melbourne. You can find a bibliography for this episode in the podcast's show notes or transcript. The Talking Art Library is an initiative of the Ian Potter Museum of Art with generous support from the Chancellery's Learning and Teaching Initiative Grant.

Music: *The Queen*, 2016, composed by Julia Potter, music composition student at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Performers: Sam Ramirez on Harp, Tom D'Ath on Clarinet, Andrew Groch on Flute, Maxim Shenko on Violin, and Danna Yun on Cello.

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations, traditional owners of the land where this podcast was produced.

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# John Brack, *The Queen*, 1988



John Brack (1920-1999), *The Queen*, 1988, oil on linen, 137.0 x 106.5cm, The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Gift of Helen Brack. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2012. [2012.0001.000.000]

Presented by Julia Potter

You can read the transcript and bibliography for this episode below.

Hello and welcome to this episode of the Talking Art Library. My name is Julia Potter and I will be discussing John Brack's *The Queen*, which was painted in 1988. The painting was presented as a gift to the University of Melbourne Art Collection by Helen Brack in 2012. I will also be presenting a piece of music I specifically wrote about this fascinating painting.

*The Queen* is a relatively large painting, being approximately a metre wide and a metre and thirty centimetres high. It is an oil painting on canvas. The subject of Brack's painting is an oval gilt-framed mirror hanging against a grey striped papered wall and sitting above a grey marble table. Floating in front of the mirror is a portrait of Queen Elizabeth the first, however her picture has been sliced into 16 evenly sized postcards. The postcards balance one on top of the other, with their fronts facing out towards the viewer. Corners balance on edges, edges balance on corners.

They are presented in four hovering towers with four postcards in each. The reverse side of the postcards are reflected in the mirror. Also reflected beyond the postcards is a dark recess. The spaces in the darkness left by the gaps between the postcards seem to take the shape of a mask-like face. Five pairs of silver scissors lay propped on the otherwise empty circular table. Each tower of postcards is supported by the sharp tips of a pair of scissors, while the smallest pair lie in the middle of the table. Overall, the painting is presented in a rather subdued and muted colouring, and is particularly caricaturized in style.

I have attempted to encapsulate the distinctive quality of Brack's painting within this accompanying piece of music. The artwork contains a variety of forms, shapes and materials. For instance, the round marble table, the gold oval frame, the elaborate portrait, the stripey wall paper and the sharp silver scissors. I have therefore aimed to mirror this juxtaposition of severity, sharpness and steel, with roundedness and beauty in the piece. For instance, there are moments of splendour and charm within the music, as well as moments of abruptness. Because balance and symmetry are prominent features in Brack's painting, I have used an arch form. For example, you may recognise the return of some musical themes as the piece ends the way it began. In the music, I purposely alluded to specific ideas within the painting. You may hear the allusion to the mask-like face which emerges from beneath the postcards, or perhaps the cutting of the Queen's portrait. I attempted to conjure a sense of magic and excitement when capturing the travelling of the postcards. The inclusion of harp in this piece evokes a sense of royalty. It is also a reference to the Elizabethan Period, in which the harp was a well used instrument.

This piece was recorded live at the Ian Potter Museum of Art in August of 2016 as part of a concert titled 'Architectonics'. The concert featured five newly composed works written specifically for the Ian Potter Museum of Art. The concert was initiated, organised and performed by students of the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music.

[ Music ]

Thank you for listening to the Talking Art Library. This episode was written and presented by Julia Potter, music composition student at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. In the piece of music, you heard Sam Ramirez on Harp, Tom D'Ath on Clarinet, Andrew Groch on Flute, Maxim Shenko on Violin, and Danna Yun on Cello.

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