

Davida Allen

In the Moment

Education Resource

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Griffith University Art Museum is proud to present a museum survey of distinguished contemporary Australian artist Davida Allen.

Admired for her expressive style and her brutally honest depiction of domestic life, Allen is one of Queensland's favourite painters. *Davida Allen: In the Moment* encompasses over 40 works from the artist's five decade practice, as well as a suite of large-scale drawings from 1982 never before exhibited.

The exhibition includes well known works from Allen's seminal series 'Death of My Father' and 'Sam Neill Suite', as well as her Archibald Prize-winning portrait of her father in law Dr John Shera. Familial relationships and Allen's experience of motherhood in a rural community are constant themes throughout her practice.

"As a woman artist my paintings are the personal response to being the 'Daughter of', 'The Wife of', 'The Mother of', 'The Grandmother of'" says Allen. *"No matter how many domestic commitments, no matter how little time in a day, no matter what responsibilities, the need to paint is constant."*

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Davida Allen
Born 1951, Charleville, Queensland
Lives and works in Ipswich

Davida Allen is known for her strongly expressionistic painting style that uses heavy brushstrokes and a bold colour palette to explore domestic life, family and the human condition. Her life as an artist, mother, wife and grandmother in rural Queensland portray the tension between creative energy and the tedium of domestic responsibilities.

In the early 1980s Allen gained notoriety for a series of paintings and drawings based on her obsession with the actor Sam Neill. These works, and the experience of having her life disseminated by the media, led to the novel *The Autobiography of Vicki Myers: Close to the Bone* and film *Feeling Sexy*, which was presented at numerous film festivals including Venice International Film Festival in 1999.

As a student, Allen studied under both Betty and Roy Churcher, at Stuartholme and Brisbane Technical College respectively, and began exhibiting with Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane in 1973. Allen won the 1986 Archibald Prize for a portrait of her father-in-law Dr John Shera, and was awarded the Tattersall's Landscape Prize in 2010. She is represented in most major Australian public collections, as well as the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.

KEY CONCEPTS

translation
language
communication
transformation
transmission
choreography
expression
performance
representaton
adaptation
interpretation

PRIMARY STUDENTS

This primary program encourages cross curriculum connections and experimental art making. Activities have been designed to involve students in creative thinking, appreciation of visual art concepts and artists, as well as art making.

RESPONDING

Look carefully at the colourful, expressive paintings in the exhibition. What kind of paint has been used by the artist to create these images? Describe how this paint looks different to other types of paint you may have used at home or in the classroom. What technique do you think the artist may have used to apply the paint to her canvas?

Take a walk around the exhibition and find a painting you find appealing. List the aspects of this image that you like most in your art journal. It could be the colours, shapes, lines, textures or patterns used by the artist. Discuss your thoughts with a friend.

Find an example of a portrait and a landscape painting in the exhibition. Look carefully and describe what you can see in each image. Write a short definition of both these painting styles in your art journal.

Davida Allen
The Orange Flowering Tree 2016
Oil on marine ply
Collection: Griffith University
Purchased 2016



MAKING

As well as painting, Davida enjoys drawing pictures that feature her family. Draw a portrait of someone in your own family in an expressive style.

Use a thick paintbrush and brightly coloured paints to create a landscape painting of your family home inspired by Davida's art work.

SECONDARY STUDENTS

The secondary activities are designed to develop and broaden students' understanding and ability to critically interpret art concepts, the artist and their practices, as well as design and make artworks using different techniques.

RESPONDING

Choose one artwork from the exhibition and list the elements and principles of design you can identify in the composition. Write a paragraph describing how the artist has used each of these elements and principles to portray a certain mood in the work.

Allen has said that she is inspired by expressionist artists such as Emil Nolde and the Fauves. Research these artists and print some examples of their work to glue into your art journal. Identify similar elements in these works to those of Davida Allen and note them down in your art journal.

Allen was the first female artist from Queensland to win the coveted Archibald Prize in 1986 for her portrait Dr John Arthur McKelvie Shera. Research another previous winner of the prize and write a short essay comparing and contrasting the two works.

Read some interviews with Davida Allen online and consider how she approaches the subject of domestic life in her art works. Discuss your thoughts in a small group and write down any interesting points in your art journal.

MAKING

Experiment with thick oil paints like those used by Davida Allen. Use different application techniques to discover a variety of outcomes. Apply the paint thickly, with a palette knife or paint brush by dabbing and pasting onto your surface. Also try scratching into the thick paint with different tools such as sticks, combs or brushes to create interesting textures.

Davida is not only a visual artist but a writer and film maker. Write a poem about a task at home which you feel is tedious, think about washing the

dishes or cleaning your room. Use your poem as the basis for a painted artwork using brightly coloured oils.

Allen is well known for her suite of works paying homage to actor Sam Neill. Create a series of drawings of your favourite celebrity in your own style which work to communicate what you find appealing about them.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This resource has been created for use by teachers and students to engage with art works and themes in the exhibition *Davida Allen: In the Moment* at Griffith University Art Museum. The concepts underpinning the exhibition provide an ideal focus for units of study relating to identity in The Visual and Media Arts and English subject areas.

This resource can be utilised by school groups visiting the exhibition or to assist with learning experiences in the classroom. Teachers can use the questions featured in this resource to prompt individual responses from students or as a starting point for wider discussion.

Davida Allen
My father-in-law hosing his celtis trees 1986
Oil on canvas

Collection: Ipswich Art Gallery
Purchased with funds donated by the Ipswich Arts Foundation, 2000

