

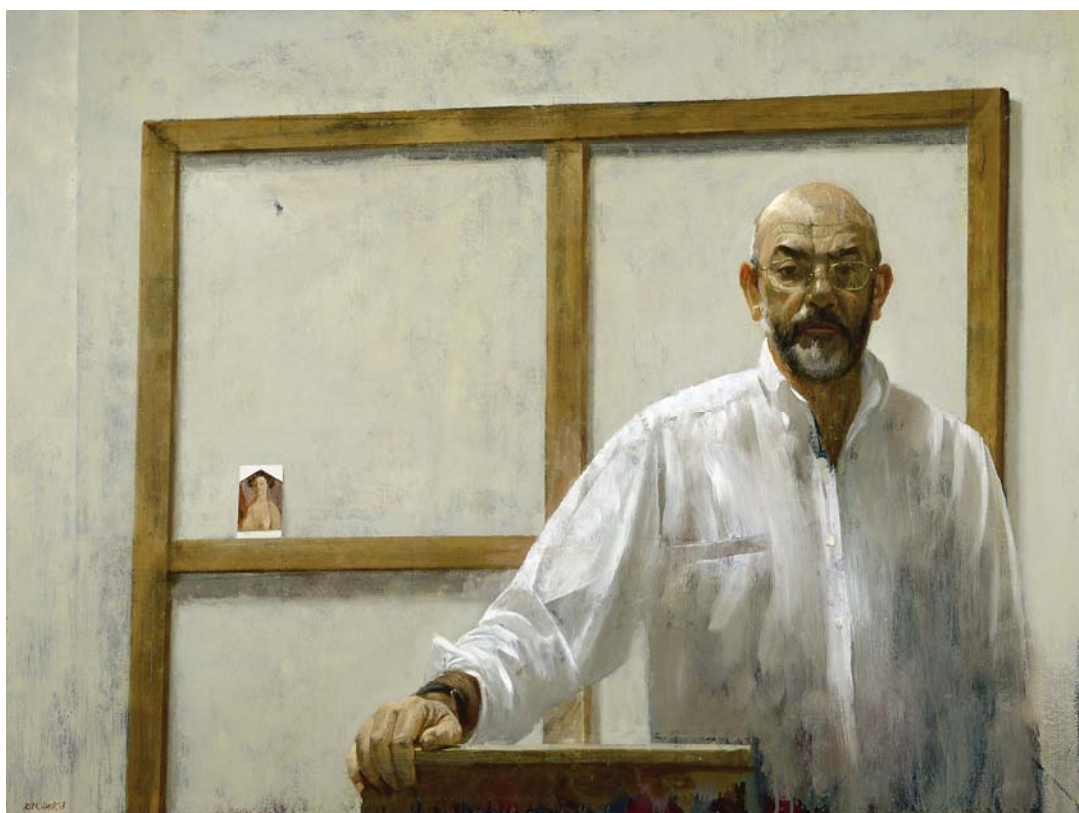
A SINGLE MIND

RICK AMOR

22 March – 13 July 2008

Education Kit

PART C: VCE Art Activities



Rick Amor
Self portrait with postcard of Greco Roman bust 2003
oil on canvas
97.0 x 130.0 cm
Collection of The University of Queensland
Purchased 2005
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VCE ART ACTIVITIES

UNIT 1, Area of Study 1: Developing ideas and skills

UNIT 3, Area of Study 1: Investigation and interpretation

Investigation and trialling of materials, techniques, working methods and themes

Rick Amor works methodically on his artworks. He compiles most of his working drawings and notations in notebooks and sketchbooks, and often trials his compositions and images in a series of sketches, prints and tonal studies, adjusting and refining the images at each stage. Amor researches and records the palettes and compositions of works by artists who he admires, and uses a combination of memory, photographs and *plein air* sketches to develop ideas for his paintings. He sometimes brainstorms titles for his paintings in lists, which help to inspire his imagery. Amor often returns to themes and motifs, but re-works them to produce new compositions and images.

Case Study: *Morning in the outlying districts* (2003), oil on canvas

Amor's artistic process is a useful way to approach the development of a VCE folio. Using *Morning in the outlying districts* (2003) as a case study, undertake these activities to prepare for the creation of your own folio.

Theory

1. Look closely at the various studies for *Morning in the outlying districts* (2003) in Amor's sketchbooks and the canvasses on display. Write down the step-by-step process Amor uses when he is planning a large-scale painting.
2. What variations occur as Amor develops the work from ink sketches to a charcoal drawing to the grisaille and oil paintings?
3. Why do you think Amor works so methodically?
4. What formal elements does Amor concentrate on in *Morning in the outlying districts* (2003)?
5. What materials and processes might you adopt from Amor's practice for your own folio? Why?



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Practice

1. Explore the characteristics of a range of black and white media, such as pen, pencil, conté, charcoal, ink, pastel and paint. Practice depicting tone by trialling a range of techniques, such as cross-hatching, rendering, smudging and pointillism.
2. Investigate the qualities of a range of painting media on different grounds, such as oil, acrylic, gouache and watercolour on canvas, paper, hessian, glass and cardboard. Record the outcomes and processes in your sketchbook.
3. Investigate the golden section and use these principles to compose a range of urban landscape drawings or paintings.
4. Collect reproductions of classical or neo-classical architecture and, using cropping, sketch a range of dramatic viewpoints.
5. Choose an interesting building and take photographs of it at different times of day, focusing on the variations in shadows. Use this as the basis of a painting, working from sketches to tonal studies, to a completed painting in a style similar to that of Amor.
6. Use the inherent geometry in buildings as the basis of a series of abstract studies.
7. Produce a series of studies that explore the idea of distorted scale.
8. Use the idea of looming shapes and strong contrasts in tone as the basis of a series of studies.
9. Use the idea of narrative as a theme. You may wish to use events in your own life or those from a book as starting points.
10. Create a series of hybrid landscapes with a solitary figure by combining your own memories and observations.

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UNIT 3, Area of Study 2: Interpreting art

Using the artworks in the exhibition and those reproduced in Part A of this Education Kit, answer the questions below. Use the commentaries to assist you.

Formal interpretation framework

1. Compare the style and technique of one of Amor's early works, *Tina ironing* (1973), with the more recent *Studio with a covered painting* (2006).
2. In his early career Amor was influenced by his teacher, the artist John Brack. Research the work of Brack and compare his paintings with Amor's 1970s works. Write an analysis that outlines the similarities and differences in style, technique and subject matter between the two artists.
3. Describe Amor's use of colour, tone and space in *The runner* (1988). How does this contribute to the mood and meaning of the artwork?
4. Describe the composition of *Morning in the outlying districts* (2003). How have the elements been arranged? What is the focal point of the artwork? How does Amor direct your attention to this part of the painting?
5. Describe Amor's use of scale in *Morning in the outlying districts* (2003). How does this contribute to the mood and meaning of the artwork?
6. What Romantic and classical elements are evident in *Morning in the outlying districts* (2003)? Why would Amor have chosen to reference these styles?
7. Describe the formal shifts that have occurred in Amor's works between the 1970s and now. Focus on style, technique colour and composition.
8. How do the formal elements of Amor's work 'suggest that behind prosaic realities something else is lurking'? Use at least two artworks to support your point of view.

COMMENTARIES

'While many of his contemporaries pursued international modes of abstraction, or pop-inspired figuration, [Amor's] own interests reflected less current trends, emulating artists whose outlooks he felt coincided with his own. His teacher John Brack was a formative figure.'

Linda Short, "A single statement of a single mind" in *A single mind: Rick Amor*, exh. cat., Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, 2008.

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‘The initial concept or field sketch is first overlaid with a grid of 90° and 45° lines, then copied and enlarged into one or more secondary drawings before being again grid-transferred to canvas. From this first small painting (the *modello* of academic practice), Amor then works the picture up, occasionally via a mid-size version, to the large, final, finished work. At every stage of this process the composition, the tonal and chromatic balance is re-worked, adjusted, refined.’

David Hansen, ‘Vacant Possession’ in *A single mind: Rick Amor*, exh. cat., Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, 2008.

Each element is carefully selected for its formal qualities and its ability to contribute to the emotional readings of the work, then carefully and formally arranged, often following traditional principles such as the “golden mean” to build both subliminal and conscious responses to the work.’

Robert Lindsay, *Rick Amor: Standing in the Shadows*, exh. cat., McClelland Gallery + Sculpture Park, Langwarrin, Victoria, 2005.

‘I take photographs, make drawings, bring them back [to the studio], combine them, pull them apart.’

Rick Amor, quoted in Chris Beck, ‘Master works’, *The Age*, 26 July 2003.

‘Rick Amor often uses a combination of images from his photo albums, each element selected for its ability to add to the emotional and visual resonance of the final composition.’

Robert Lindsay, *Rick Amor: Standing in the Shadows*, exh. cat., McClelland Gallery + Sculpture Park, Langwarrin, Victoria, 2005.

‘Rick Amor locates his art within a Romantic tradition of painting, but with an inherent dichotomy, for his approach to the formalist construction of his works reflects a Classicist cerebral allegiance to structure and technique.’

Robert Lindsay, *Rick Amor: Standing in the Shadows*, exh. cat., McClelland Gallery + Sculpture Park, Langwarrin, Victoria, 2005.

Psychoanalysis framework

1. Discuss the ways in which Amor’s childhood in Long Island, Frankston is reflected in his work. What themes and emotions does Amor tend to focus on? What could be the reasons for this?
2. The central figure in Amor’s work *Tina Ironing* (1973) depicts his first wife Tina. What do you think Amor is communicating about his domestic situation in this artwork?
3. Where is there evidence of Amor’s use of dreams in his artworks? Reference two works in your response.

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4. What mood is evident in *The runner* (1988)? Discuss with reference to Amor's preoccupations and influences as referenced in the commentaries.
5. How has Amor presented himself in *Self portrait with postcard of Greco Roman bust* (2003)? What emotion is evident? What is the significance of the white shirt and postcard?
6. What do you think Amor is saying about his role as an artist in *Studio with a covered painting* (2006)? What is the significance of the covered canvas?

COMMENTARIES

'I dream about the sea all the time. It's always dramatic. There's [sic] dark clouds and rough seas and the feeling that something is about to happen. There is a perceived threat.'

Rick Amor, quoted in Chris Johnston, 'Secrets of the sea', *The Age*, 27 September 2002.

'[In 1982] I began to paint subjects that I found personal significance in, especially the sea. I rediscovered my childhood.'

Rick Amor, quoted in Chris Johnston, 'Secrets of the sea', *The Age*, 27 September 2002.

'I invent places that I like to see, sort of strange places. It's a bit like a dream – but off to one side.'

Rick Amor, quoted in Chris Beck, 'Master works', *The Age*, 26 July 2003.

'A man or woman's life should be there in the face without enhancement from me. If the portrait shows psychological depth it's a bonus, but not something I consciously paint in.'

Rick Amor, quoted in Dimity Goldie, 'A meeting of great minds...', *Portrait.4*, Winter 2002.

'Rick Amor's painted world is like a dream – or a nightmare. It draws you in but leaves you feeling strangely detached. Like a dream, you wake up before the image gives you answers.'

Scott Bevan, 'Disquieting tales of the unexpected', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 August 2004.

'I've always thought that behind the façade of buildings all sorts of mysterious things go on. I suppose it's from my childhood and reading Kafka. I like to suggest that behind prosaic realities something else is lurking.'

Rick Amor, quoted in Gary Catalano, *The Solitary Watcher: Rick Amor and his Art*, The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2001.

'I don't dwell on the mother thing [Amor's mother died when he was 13], or the suggestion that my work echoes a sense of loss, voids and empty spaces. I was a kid with a nice dad, who gave me his paints and let me be an artist.'

Rick Amor, quoted in Louise Bellamy, 'In search of beauty', *The Age*, 18 September 2004.

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‘A number of Amor’s works [from the 1990s] are steeped in autobiographical significance and take as their subject specific memories of personalities and locations from his adolescence. In keeping with the romantic tenor of much of his later painting the monumental scale of the brooding clouds and turbulent sea [in *The beach* (1995)] impart a sense of threat and ominous presence.’

Linda Short, “A single statement of a single mind” in *A single mind: Rick Amor*, exh. cat., Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, 2008.

‘Rick Amor imbues his works with an emotional tone of anxiety and apprehension. These emotions are amplified in nature by dark storm clouds, dramatic long shadows and encroaching twilight, and within his cityscapes by grandiose impersonal spaces with dark corners and high windows from which sentinels of the state, both real and imagined, observe.’

Robert Lindsay, *Rick Amor: Standing in the Shadows*, exh. cat., McClelland Gallery + Sculpture Park, Langwarrin, Victoria, 2005.

‘*Doorway* (2004), painted during Amor’s battle with leukaemia, has no such ambiguity. It is the sarcophagus-door to Hades, its black interior almost as solid as the monolith in Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*.’

David Hansen, ‘Vacant Possession’ in *A single mind: Rick Amor*, exh. cat., Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, 2008.

Symbolism framework

1. What recurring motifs appear in Amor’s work? Analyse one early and one later work to outline the stylistic changes that Amor made to these motifs over time and their possible meanings.
2. The running man figure first appeared in Amor’s work in 1983, and he has developed the motif throughout his career. (Amor’s bronze *Running man* (1996–2005) is on permanent display in the Connie Kimberley Sculpture Park, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne.) What do you think the running man might symbolise? Using Amor’s *The runner* (1988), interpret the symbolism of the running man.
3. Amor returns to images of the pier and sea, which are inspired by his memories of the beach at Long Island, Frankston, where he grew up. Amor also admits to dreaming about the sea frequently. Look closely at Amor’s depiction of the sea in *The runner* (1988). Why do you think he has painted it this way? What might be the significance of this approach?
4. What is the significance of the postcard in Amor’s *Self portrait with postcard of Greco Roman bust* (2003)?

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5. What is the significance of the covered canvas in Amor's *Studio with a covered painting* (2006)?

COMMENTARIES

'All artists paint the same picture with half a dozen themes and variations on those themes.'

Rick Amor, quoted in Louise Bellamy, 'In search of beauty', *The Age*, 18 September 2004.

'Amor's figures operate as a symbol for the Everyman and his elimination of the individuality of the figure through maintaining a back view, echoes the compositional devices of the German Romantic artist Caspar David Friedrich.'

Robert Lindsay, *Rick Amor: Standing in the Shadows*, exh. cat., McClelland Gallery + Sculpture Park, Langwarrin, Victoria, 2005.

'A major recurring motif in Amor's work from the late 1980s to the 1990s is the figure of the running man – poised on one leg, in flight from an unseen threatened menace.'

Robert Lindsay, *Rick Amor: Standing in the Shadows*, exh. cat., McClelland Gallery + Sculpture Park, Langwarrin, Victoria, 2005.

'The industrial wastelands that predominate in his recent imagery deliberately depict the point where the advance of the man-made world meets the natural environment.'

Linda Short, "A single statement of a single mind" in *A single mind: Rick Amor*, exh. cat., Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, 2008.

Extended responses

1. Compare and contrast Amor's early works (from the 1960s or 1970s) with his most recent paintings.
2. Compare and contrast two of Amor's self portraits.
3. Compare and contrast two of Amor's 'pier' or 'sea' paintings.
4. Compare and contrast Amor's woodcut, *Runner* (1984) with his painting, *The runner* (1988).
5. Interpret the meanings and messages of *Morning in the outlying districts* (2003) or *Self portrait with postcard of Greco Roman bust* (2003) using either the Psychoanalysis or Symbolism framework.



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6. Choose one of the following works and write a formal interpretation of it:

- *Tina ironing* (1973)
- *The runner* (1988)
- *Morning in the outlying districts* (2003)
- *Studio with a covered painting* (2006)

Plan your response by completing the table overleaf:

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VCE ART – FORMAL INTERPRETATION OF AN ARTWORK

	Visual Analysis	Style	Technique	Meanings and Messages
Artist:				
Title:				
Date:				
Medium:				
Dimensions:				