**Ben Quilty**  
**Education Resource**

*Self-portrait smashed Rorschach (installation view)*  
2009  
Oil on linen  
Collection of the artist

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**Introduction**

Ben Quilty is undoubtedly one of Australia’s best-known and highly-regarded contemporary painters. His work is characterised by a gestural painterly style and is widely known for his quick working method, which deliberately leaves smears, smudges and almost three-dimensional brush marks on the canvas.

This exhibition at Bendigo Art Gallery brings together the works shown in London at the Saatchi Gallery in 2014, alongside *Kuta Rorschach No.2*, a work recently acquired by the Gallery.

His paintings depict rural Australia and some of the more challenging aspects of our culture and history. European settlement, the rites and rituals of masculinity, nationhood and the plight of Indigenous Australians are ongoing themes.

The exhibition includes a selection of paintings from his acclaimed Rorschach series, which mimic the ‘ink blot’ tests introduced in the 1920s as a tool for psychological testing. Each of the paintings depicts picture-book landscape scenes that belie their more sinister history. For example, *Fairy Bower Rorschach* (2012) captures the New South Wales tourist attraction Fairy Bower Falls, which is also thought to be the site of an horrific massacre of Aboriginal people. While *Kuta Rorschach No.2* shows the famous Kuta beach in Bali – a popular holiday destination for Australians and inextricably linked to the ‘Bali bombings’ of 2002 – a terrorist attack which claimed the lives of 202 people from 22 countries, including 88 Australians and more recently, the jailing of the Bali 9, a group of young men and one woman who attempted to smuggle hard drugs from the country in 2005.
Quilty appropriates the Colonial painter HJ Johnstone’s 1880 painting in *Evening Shadows, Rorschach after Johnston* 2011. In 1881 JH Johnstone’s *Evening Shadows, backwater of the Murray South Australia* was donated to the Art Gallery of South Australia and is the Gallery’s first recorded acquisition. This work is thought to be one of the most copied paintings in Australia – with at least 90 known copies. Quilty’s work was created for the 130th anniversary of the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2011 and highlights the artist’s ongoing concern for the destruction of Australia’s Indigenous peoples. The original painting depicts an idyllic natural setting – three Aboriginal people are camping alongside the winding river. The painting appears almost timeless and makes the viewer ponder whether the scene is meant to represent a time before European colonisation. The only clue in the painting is the woven blanket wrapped around the shoulders of one of the figures – undoubtedly given by the colonisers. Quilty’s contemporary interpretation of this work, in particular his use of the Rorschach technique, affords a different interpretation. The figures of the people are all but obliterated – the figure possible to see on the right-hand panel is barely visible in its ‘reflection’. Furthermore, viewing this from a contemporary framework we know the appalling state of the River Murray, its destruction from over use and pollution – a picturesque view of this river is hard to come by in the 21st century.

In *Inhabit*, 2010, Quilty interrogates the history of European settlement in Australia and attempts to come to terms with his own habitation of the lands of Australia’s Indigenous cultures. The series travels from a depiction of Captain Cook as the Devil, to a self-portrait. In the final paintings, the human figure all but dissolves. The ornate black birdcage was originally intended to house a Myna – a bird introduced from India and southern Asia which is now recognised as an invasive species in Australia and other parts of the world.

In *Self-portrait smashed Rorschach* 2009, we see Quilty depict himself in a drunken state, mirrored using the Rorschach technique; he has often commented on the differences in rites of passage between indigenous and non-indigenous Australian males and he reflects on his experiences as a young, risk-taking male. His studies into indigenous culture raised awareness of these differences.

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**Kuta Rorschach No 2**
2014
Oil on canvas
Collection Bendigo Art Gallery
Image courtesy the artist and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne
Themes

The artworks in this exhibition address three of Quilty’s most widely explored themes: **Australian masculinity, national identity and mortality.**

**Australian masculinity**

Ben Quilty is a fifth generation Australian of Irish descent. He spent his childhood and youth in north-western Sydney, an area which he did not consider to be of great stimulus for art until later in life. Although he enjoyed art at school, his youth was spent doing what he felt was typical at the time as an Australian male, engaging in risk-taking activities such as bonding with mates through drinking, drugs and cars. He considers himself both an observer and participator in these rites of passage, and recent events such as losing one friend after a buck’s party mishap and another to pancreatic cancer throw such behaviours into question. Through his postgraduate studies into indigenous cultures, he has developed a deep appreciation of the lack of acknowledgement of indigenous history and culture. For example, he learnt that for many Aboriginal males, becoming an adult involves around thirteen years of serious initiation which was in direct contrast to his own experiences of coming of age which involved drunkenness and vomiting.

Quilty has said that the way he paints “mirrors the attitude of the young male” “We used to go out and get into fights and drive like absolute maniacs and knock things down as we drove along and that application of paint represents those kinds of ideas in another way.”

His ongoing investigation into themes of masculinity and mateship have led him to visit convicted drug smuggler Myuran Sukumaran in the infamous Kerobokan prison in Bali. Quilty mentored him with his art and was greatly impressed at the development of his artistic talent and how reformed he was as a now mature male. Quilty considers that most Australian men do not gain maturity until around twenty-four years of age and that this has impacted on the poor decisions made by Sukumaran and the other Bali nine captors. Although *Kuta Rorschach No. 2,* in the exhibition, does not depict Sukumaran directly (Quilty has also produced portraits of him that are not in the exhibition), the inclusion of Kuta Beach in Bali as a subject, touches on the temptations faced by Australian tourists who frequently fail to see the consequences of their risk-taking activities in this tourist mecca.

**National identity and Landscape**

A major component of the exhibition at Bendigo Art Gallery consists of Quilty’s recent exploration of landscapes using the *Rorschach* method of sandwiching one side of a painting onto another to produce an almost-mirror image. In *Postcolonial investigation,* Quilty takes scenes from well-known places made popular as tourist destinations or as subject matter of iconic artworks that all have a darker history behind them. He reworks them using the Rorschach method on a very large scale to deconstruct or ‘destroy’ the image. These landscapes could be seen as allegorical as they initially have the surface meaning of a luscious, idealised landscape but this belies their sinister history or association. *Evening Shadows, Rorschach after Johnston* and *Fairy Bower Rorschach* both depict landscapes showing peaceful scenes, with only minimal figures, whereas both locations would have been more heavily populated with indigenous people prior to colonization.

“By the time of the original painting by Henry James Johnstone, *Evening Shadows* was made all the inhabitants of that land had been murdered or died of smallpox. Johnstone instead depicts a tranquil scene of homely bliss with aboriginal man and woman with tiny baby - a colonial utopia. Quilty re-investigates this paradox and through the use of his Rorschach* technique playfully forces the viewer to re-evaluate their own role in the history of colonisation.”
In *Inhabit* he also considers himself as an Irish born Australian as being part of the Colonial ‘invasion’ of Australia and includes himself in the sequence of what could be seen as the beginning of the end. As Quilty created this series of paintings five years after the infamous race riots in Sydney’s Cronulla beach between white and largely Lebanese Australians, he considered Australia’s identity in a contemporary sense. Quilty has said that *Inhabit* is a commentary “on a country taken by storm a little over two hundred years ago...a response to the young Caucasian men who aggressively wrap the Australian flag around their shoulders and whose war cry is one of racism and bigotry”. 3

**Mortality**

Overlapping the themes of Australian masculinity and identity through use of the landscape, Quilty also investigates notions of mortality in a personal sense, and also through investigation of contemporary and historical events. Throughout the years, he has challenged the idea of presenting the heroic in male portraiture by depicting his mates, renowned alcoholic musician Jimmy Barnes and himself in states of drunkenness. In *Self-portrait smashed Rorschach*, Quilty we see the artist look upwards, as if questioning himself in this state. He has recently lost two friends through alcohol use – one who drowned after falling off a boat at a bachelor’s party and one who died of pancreatic cancer so the reality of these self-destructive behaviours is very personal to him. The meshing of ideas about bonding, mateship and mortality in Australian young men were also prevalent when he became an official war artist in 2011 and went to Afghanistan. As Quilty commented, “The opportunity to go and work with these young men in Afghanistan was almost the height of my exploration of the way masculinity plays itself out in our culture.” 4 In this series, Quilty chose the untraditional stance depicting the soldiers nude and vulnerable, exposing their fragility and fatigue.

The series *Inhabit*, 2010 also combines concepts of history in the form of Captain James Cook’s discovery of Australia and the inherent violence that this occurred with his own thoughts of mortality. In the sequence, we see Quilty’s self-portrait gradually disappear, which could be read both literally, as being about his own life and death and symbolically, about history disappearing. The cage, originally titled *The Joseph Banks Project no. 1* (2011) and exhibited alongside his series of budgie paintings can be seen as a functionless prison. Quilty learnt that every native bird that had been put into one of these cages by Joseph Banks in the 1770s during his studies into ornithology in Australia had died. Quilty’s cage has been decorated with ornaments related to introduced species, such as the Indian Myna bird and invasive blackberries. The cage is intended to symbolise the devastating effect Europeans have had on the country through introduced species which include flora, fauna and humans.

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*Inhabit* (detail: Installation view)  
2010  
oil on linen, steel, bronze  
Collection: Art Gallery of South Australia  
Gift of the Art Gallery of South Australian Contemporary Collectors to mark the 130th anniversary of the Gallery 2011
Subject matter

Skulls
Skulls appear in a number of Quilty’s series, including Inhabit, in the Bendigo Art Gallery exhibition. Although the skulls may be read as symbolising the death of indigenous people as a result of Colonial invasion after Captain Cook’s discovery of the land, they can also been seen in a broad metaphysical sense of Quilty considering his own mortality. He admits to undertaking in risk-taking activities involving alcohol, drugs and cars in his youth and reflects on this. “Every so often when I was drinking and taking drugs to the point of getting violently ill with my mates, I’d start asking them, ‘Why are we doing this?’” 5 His personal experience of losing a friend after a drunken episode may also impact on his thoughts about life and death. Having studied art through two degrees at tertiary level he would be aware of the historical use of skulls in paintings as vanitas or memento mori. On a personal level, the first skull in the sequence of Inhabit is actually appropriated from an image he used to draw on his folders whilst at school, so in Inhabit he is again drawing on his youth and the rebellious activities undertaken during this period of life. He is also aware of how the skull has infiltrated popular culture so his inclusion of the skull could have Postmodern connotations. “I came across the skull thing eight years ago,” he recalls. “While buying shirts for my little cousins for their birthdays and Christmas, I found that all the clothes for young boys had skulls on them. It’s such a weird concept, for a little kid to have death on their clothing. I think that the devils and related iconography when you are an 18-year-old male, smoking and drinking too much, are images of rebellion where there is nothing to rebel against. They are kind of meaningless,” 6

Landscape
The landscapes in this exhibition showcase a new direction in his art with large scale mirror reflections using the Rorschach technique. In Postmodern and Postcolonial style, they represent either direct appropriation of paintings (Evening Shadows, Rorschach after Johnston) or referencing of renowned places, but the images are reworked to interrogate the original meanings or assumptions about these places. In Evening Shadows, Rorschach after Johnston and Fairy Bower Rorschach, Quilty’s Postgraduate studies into indigenous cultures impacted on his knowledge about murders of Aboriginal people that occurred on the land that have not been written into history books. In Kuta Rorschach No.2 he also considers the lack of cultural respect white Australians tend to pay to indigenous cultures when they travel there as tourists. The layering of meaning which raises questions about established histories is a feature of both Postmodernism and Postcolonialism. The landscapes can be read as allegories of the negative consequences of Colonial conquests.
Fairy Bower Rorschach
2012
oil on linen
Collection Art Gallery of New South Wales.
Purchased with funds provided by the Patrick White Bequest 2012

Heads/ portraiture
Another traditional theme in art that is recontextualised by Quilty is portraiture and this is represented in two distinctly different artworks in the Bendigo Art Gallery exhibition. In Self-portrait smashed Rorschach his figures are depicted from an unconventional below subject view and face each other. Although the portraits in Inhabit are depicted from a more conventional front-on view, they are executed with strong and direct gestural lines, with simple backgrounds. Rather than aiming for a slick and finished aesthetic as many other contemporary painters do, Quilty’s treatment of the portrait is rough, confronting and direct.

Other subject matter not seen in the Bendigo Art Gallery exhibition
Subjects in other artworks not represented in Ben Quilty at Bendigo Art Gallery continue to investigate his themes of Australian masculinity, national identity and mortality through a diverse range of portraiture subjects, cars and birds. His ground breaking Torana car series expressed his identity as a suburban young man growing up on the outskirts of Sydney; he eschews all cuteness with his portraits of his son as a baby, depicting him sandwiched in a hamburger; the Afghanistan soldiers were raw and naked; portraits of celebrities such as singer Jimmy Barnes and the Archibald Prize winning portrait of Margaret Olley were large and painterly. The Torana car series were not just about his experience of a risk-taking young man on the fringes of Sydney. He discovered that Holden began naming cars in the 1970’s with appropriated Aboriginal terms, Torana – the Aboriginal word meaning ‘to fly’. His series of paintings of budgies were also displayed alongside the sculptural cage, previously titled The Joseph Banks Project which is part of the Bendigo Art Gallery exhibition.
Other subjects not in the *Ben Quilty* exhibition

**Torana No. 5**  
Oil on canvas  
2003  
120x130cm  
Courtesy of the artist

**Pearl Pied Pete**  
2004  
Oil on canvas  
60x50cm  
Courtesy of the artist

**Troy Park, after Afghanistan**  
2012  
Oil on linen  
190x140cm  
Courtesy of the artist
Influences

Academic Studies:
Ben Quilty was interested in art from an early age, studying visual arts in high school at Kenthurst, outer Sydney. In 1991, his talent was recognised when he was selected for the highly competitive ARTEXPRESS (the NSW equivalent of Victoria’s TOP ARTS) exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW. Quilty completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts from Sydney College of the Arts in 1994 followed by a Certificate in Aboriginal Culture and History at Monash University in 1996. These studies drew his attention to the fact that many atrocities occurred in the past towards indigenous people that have only been communicated verbally and therefore are not widely known. Colonisation and Aboriginal culture have become important themes in Quilty’s art practice. In 2001, he completed a Bachelor of Visual Communication from the University of Western Sydney, which included a unit in women’s studies. “I became very aware that to understand [the] strange role that I was playing as a young man in my society ... I had to understand contemporary feminist theory.”

Artistic influences
As an art student, Quilty was influenced by the painters Frank Auerbach and Nicholas Harding. Like Quilty, Nicholas Harding is also an Australian artist and Archibald Prize winner who produces portraits and landscapes using a thick impasto technique. Quilty has been compared to Harding in various scholarly articles. Although Harding has lived in Australia for many years, his years in Britain (he emigrated as a boy) have influenced him and his style can be seen as similar to other Modern British painters such as Frank Auerbach.

Frank Auerbach was a German born artist who escaped Nazi Germany as a child in the 1930s alongside many other German Jews. He settled in England and became a citizen there in 1947. As an artist he is renowned for his highly gestural, low key toned painted and drawn portraits. The darkness and horror shown in his portraits may have been influenced by his life experiences as his parents were murdered in the concentration camps in 1942 and he lived in refugee camps as an orphan in England for many years.

Quilty’s use of plain backgrounds was partly influenced by the simplicity of the still life paintings of Italian painter Giorgio Morandi (1890 –1964). Quilty was shown a book of Morandi by his mother who taught him that quiet spaces were necessary in art. Quilty understood from this that no decoration or background was necessary unless there were visual messages implicit and that stillness and reflection was necessary.

The late Australian artist Margaret Olley not only became an Archibald Prize winning subject for Quilty in 2011, but also influenced his ideas towards mortality and life: “Recently, I was amazed at how many new works she had on the go. She said to me, “I’m like an old tree dying and setting forth flowers as fast as it can, while it still can.” I thought that was such a powerful metaphor.”

In more recent years Quilty has been interested in his Australian contemporary Adam Cullen (who died in 2012) and chose him for his Archibald Prize entry in 2006. Quilty would have identified with Cullen’s investigation into the darker side of Australian identity which he depicted in shocking portraits of strange people and animals that he deemed “loserville”. Of his Archibald Portrait of Cullen, Quilty explained Cullen’s personality: “Adam lives in the Blue Mountains and shoots feral animals to freeze them in his fridge. “He is 40, drives an FC Holden and is currently unlicensed. This is a portrait of Adam before four vodkas and after 15.”

In the Postmodern 21st century, Australian identity has never before been so religiously, culturally and regionally diverse. Artists now explore identity from a broad range of perspectives and
Australian masculine identity is explored similarly in the paintings of both Quilty and Cullen. Although each artist employs the age-old theme of portraiture, the idea of the heroic, hardworking Australian male, as depicted in late 19th century paintings is replaced by Cullen with images of outsiders, drunks, and infamous characters, often drawn from personal experiences. Whilst Quilty draws on his experience of risk-taking with mates as a young man, Cullen draws on disturbing imagery he witnessed in his youth. Having a father who walked around nude from the waist down and witnessing the torturing of a kangaroo that had his tail cut off, leaving him to try to move around unbalanced and in agony may have influenced Cullen to depict losers, outsiders, criminals and disturbing hybrid creatures. Unlike traditional portrait painting, Cullen’s subjects are pushed up against a foreshortened picture plane with luridly bright and flat backgrounds. Although choosing a different palette and painterly technique, Quilty similarly presents his portrait subjects in unconventional views by presenting them from unusual points of view such as looking upwards.

**Personal Experiences and Environment**

It wasn’t until he travelled to Spain in 2007 to undertake an artist residency that Quilty reflected on his own environment. Quilty was awarded a residency in the Barcelona studio by The Australia Council for the Arts. Upon return, he, (now famously) recalled an influential quote by Arthur Streeton “Look to your own backyard for inspiration”; this influenced Quilty to consider his background of growing up in the north-western suburbs of Sydney, which he previously would not have considered worthy of drawing on the subject matter from. He subsequently explored car culture as a theme and produced his now famous series of paintings depicting his Torana car and portraits of his drunken mates. While in Spain, he also visited the Prado Museum in the nation’s capital, Madrid, which features one of the world’s best collections of European figurative art from the great masters such as Goya; he also visited cathedrals in Barcelona. "You can't help but be overwhelmed with Catholic iconography in Barcelona. I went to church as a kid, so for me the big Rorschachs allude to the way the church is set up with an altar and vases, everything in proportion." 

Quilty’s fascination with the destructive tendencies of youth masculinity led him to meet Myuran Sukumayan, a convicted Australian on death row in Indonesia since 2005. Sukumayan, one of the Australian drug smugglers known as the Bali Nine, took up painting in his cell at Kerobokan Prison. Under Quilty’s mentorship, Sukumayan developed confidence as a painter and entered a self-portrait into the Archibald Prize. Quilty’s painting *Kuta Rorschach No.2*, although on the surface a landscape, also references the darker side of Bali such as the Bali bombing and the fate of young Australian men such as Sukumayan. This painting blends his themes of Australian masculinity, Australian identity and the landscape.

**Materials and Techniques**

Ben Quilty is largely a painter although some of his exhibited artworks are drawings and sculptures. Oil painting is chosen for its ability to create a thick impasto technique and dry without cracking. His painting style is more influential than derivative and many artists are now trying to use the “Quilty” style in their work; interestingly, when he studied Art at University level in the 1990s, painting was seen to be going out of fashion and those that did paint, did so in a slick flat, photo-realist style. He applies large amounts of pigment with cake decorating tools rather than palette knives. He discovered these tools when working in a studio in an industrial area near the Sydney airport which happened to be next door to a cake factory; he found them to be much cheaper than traditional palette knives. "I used to use palette knives from France that cost $60 each until a neighbour who makes cupcakes walked in and said: ‘That's not a palette knife - *this* is a palette knife.'"
He mixes oil paint with gel medium to help the paint to dry. Aware of the dangers of inhalation of fumes from spraying, he wears overalls, gloves and a gas mask depending on the process.

Quilty says he is energised by his "almost violent" application of paint because it allows him to get images out of his head and on to the canvas quickly. "I guess, in some way, it mirrors the attitude of the young male as well," he says. "We used to go out and get into fights and drive like absolute maniacs and knock things down as we drove along and that application of paint represents those kinds of ideas in another way." 11

The actual process of painting for Quilty is sometimes quick and vigorous; like Impressionist painters of the late 19th century, his act of painting quickly enables a gestural approach whereby the brush strokes are evident. It is also essential to work quickly when producing paintings using the Rorschach technique otherwise the paint will start to dry. Sometimes he spray paints a background first and for some exhibitions this has extended onto the wall, so that he artwork becomes ephemeral; i.e. the wall drawing component is painted over after the exhibition is finished. “For me the actual painting process (which is only a fraction of the time I spend in the studio) is an action...and a very physical one.” 12

The recent use of the Rorschach technique came about when he accidentally squashed a “bad” painting; he found the resulting image similar to the Shroud of Turin and he started to think about how people regarded the possible imprint (of Jesus) as being imbued with spirit. In choosing to explore the Rorschach method, Quilty was also paying homage to Hermann Rorschach, the creator of the Rorschach test. Quilty respected him for the contribution he made to mental health.

“For me painting is the most vital, immediate and effective way to make a statement about being alive. With the use of the most primitive tools I can quickly make comments about my own existence and of the world as I see it.” 13

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*Evening Shadows, Rorschach after Johnstone*

2011

oil on linen

Collection: Art Gallery of South Australia, Gift of Ben Quilty through the Art Gallery of South Australia Contemporary Collectors 2012.

Donated through the Australian Government’s Cultural Gifts Program
Terminology

**Allegory**
Allegory can be seen as a story with two levels of meaning; therefore allegory in art might reflect that there are hidden meanings within the art that is beyond the surface reading.

**Decalcomania**
This is a painting technique initiated by the Surrealist artists in the 1920s when they were exploring non-conventional painting and collage techniques to create dream-like imagery. It is a process of spreading thick paint upon a canvas and then compressing another flat material on top of it. This covering is then removed before the paint dries and the resultant paint pattern becomes the basis of the finished painting. The Surrealist artist Max Ernst was renowned for his use of this technique.

**Impasto**
This is thickly applied paint, usually oil based; traditionally impasto can be worked back into with tools such as palette knives or applied directly to the surface such as canvas or board. It gained popularity with the French Impressionists of the late 19th century to be developed further by 20th and 21st century painters. Artists such as Ben Quilty have taken impasto to a new level, creating paintings with extreme thicknesses. This technique was also popular with the Neo-Expressionist painters of the 1980s such as Peter Booth in Australia.

**Metaphysics**
This is a traditional branch of philosophy concerned with explaining the fundamental nature of being and the world that encompasses it. Artists such as Ben Quilty explore the idea of metaphysics from both a historical and personal point of view.

**Memento mori**
Memento mori is a Latin term which literally translates as: 'remember (that you have) to die’. It is a theory and practice of reflection on life and death, considering that all worldly pursuits are vain as we will all be reduced to equals in death. In art, memento mori is an artistic or symbolic reminder that everything that lives, dies.

**Postcolonialism**
Postcolonial art usually questions assumptions with regards to established Colonial history. In Australian art, many contemporary artists address the fact that much of Colonial history was biased from a western point of view and raise issues about the romanticisation of the Colonial landscape especially with regards to its inclusion or exclusion of indigenous figures.

**Rorschach**
The Rorschach test is named after its creator, Swiss psychologist Hermann Rorschach. It is a test in which subjects’ perceptions of inkblots are recorded and then analysed using psychological interpretation. This is done by folding a piece of paper that has random ink blots on it and the participant tells the psychologist what they can see. The test became one of the most widely used psychological tests in the 1960s, during the counter culture period.

**Vanitas**
Vanitas are objects that relate to the transient nature of life, which could translate to the meaningless of objects and pursuits; vanitas were common in art especially in the 16th and 17th century in Flanders (now the Netherlands); common subjects depicted would include skulls, rotting fruit or flowers in various states of decay.
Quotes

From the artist

About why he paints: “My work explores the life that I have led and the subcultures and rituals that best describe the nature of male angst and rebellion. I always think the work I make is fairly autobiographical. I’m not trying hard to build some conceptual framework and, in fact, the more closely I look at my own life the easier it is to make work. Most of my work investigates the relationship between a luscious surface and the darker and more confronting nature of the overall image. I enjoy the theatrics of forcing the viewer to move back from the enticing surface to see the more figurative imagery hidden in the paint. My application of paint is quick and violent, and the imagery is often connected to the uneasy feeling of facing an uncertain future or the indulgent glorification of decline.”

About painting: “For me painting will always exist. It is a very real thing and always has been. From my earliest recollections of art, I remember looking at art books and being moved by the way a painting could be such a wonderful departure from ‘normal’ life. I remember seeing one of Fred Williams’s last exhibitions before he died and being mesmerised. I have learnt to love sculpture and photo-based media and digital art but, for me, my love of painting is instinctive.”

On using his own life in his art: “I’m not trying hard to build some conceptual framework and, in fact, the more closely I look at my own life the easier it is to make work.”

About using the Rorschach method with the subject of musician Jimmy Barnes: “The act of destroying the first image creates a more beautiful Rorschach ‘butterfly’ – and a glorification of decline.”

About his painting technique: Quilty has said that the way he paints “mirrors the attitude of the young male … We used to go out and get into fights and drive like absolute maniacs and knock things down as we drove along and that application of paint represents those kinds of ideas in another way.”

About travel and overseas residencies: “Part of my practice has always dealt with my feelings about Australian-ness. Travelling reminds me that, contrary to many patriotic Australians, this country is not the ‘best country in the world’.”

About the influence of Spain: An Australia Council residency in Spain last year also had an impact. “You can’t help but be overwhelmed with Catholic iconography in Barcelona. I went to church as a kid, so for me the big Rorschachs allude to the way the church is set up with an altar and vases, everything in proportion.”

About his experiences of creating an unflattering self-portrait after visiting the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, Spain during an Australian Council Residency: “I didn’t think I’d be as impressed as I was,” he says. “Everything was about the joy of life, or this horrible fiery death. It’s so overwhelming, and so, so inspiring. I walked out of there and wanted to make a portrait as though I was gazing into the fires of hell.”

About using male rites of passage as a theme: “I think men do those things because it’s like self-initiation. There’s no initiation process for young men. When you turn 18 you skull a yard glass and you spew on yourself and then you’re supposedly a male that’s got something to give to society. It’s
just so far from how it should work. It's definitely informed my work; it's what I'm interested in because it's where I've been. It's what I've done.”  

About depicting the negative side of Australian identity: “I love my life, my family, friends and work, and I'm a very lucky person,” he says. "But there are some really bad things happening. It seems to me that in Australia no one talks about them, and if you do you're branded as a pessimist. It's just ridiculous.”

"The whole 'un-Australian' thing at the moment, that's just insane. I mean, Captain Cook shot the first Aboriginal he met - well, let's talk about that. What's un-Australian? What school do you ever learn Aboriginal in? You learn French and German but I've never heard of a school that teaches Aboriginal and that's the most un-Australian thing I can think of.”

About the Joseph Banks cage: “The Joseph Banks Project cages are based loosely on the cages Banks used to cage the earliest endemic species in the first European colony here in Australia. He spoke of the Paradise Parrot as being hauntingly beautiful and within a decade of his discovery of this bird they were extinct. The cages I have built for this exhibition are function-less prisons. They have no doors, no water or feed bowls and are inhospitable and black. I aimed to create beautiful and dark ornaments symbolising the effect Europeans (myself included) have had on the country we’ve called Australia. They are adorned with cast Indian Myna skulls – the most globally successful avian invader, and talons and skulls of the endangered Wedge Tailed Eagle.”

Quotes about Quilty by others

“Like most people, Ben Quilty defies caricature. A bogan who chose to pursue a degree in Aboriginal culture. A petrolhead who buys his art supplies at Bunnings, yet carries tiny notebooks full of the most exquisite pen-and-ink sketches of Venice done in his recent youth. Close in, where Quilty works, his paintings look like a bad paving job. Step back twenty feet and he’s caught the whole sorry tale, a country built by the survivors of pogroms, massacres and land clearances elsewhere, who found a haven here on land cleared by massacres of our own.” – Don Walker, musician and writer

"Nothing about these works was banal . . . The artist sometimes calls these paintings landscapes. Cars are what most people see most of the time, not mountains or trees or churches or sunsets.” Germain Greer, writer

“His massive, attention-grabbing paintings seem to have been executed by giants wielding blunt instruments (but miraculously resolve themselves into sensitive portraits when viewed from a couple of metres back).” Nick Dent, Timeout, Sydney

About Inhabit: “Ben Quilty's recent suite of paintings, Inhabit, 2010, demonstrate an important culmination in his work as it explores wider concepts of identity. Quilty, a distinguished portraitist arrived at the multi-part epic in an attempt to reconcile his identity as a white Australian. Conceived as a self-portrait, Inhabit also acts as a collective national portrait and could arguably be considered a barometer of domestic sentiment as the Australian reconciliation movement progresses.” Art Gallery of South Australia
Footnotes

3 Ben Quilty, Prudential Eye Catalogue, 2014
5 Ben Quilty, quoted in, Janet Hawley, *Tour of duty, Good Weekend, Sydney Morning Herald*, 2012, p. 14
6 Ben Quilty quoted in, *Caught on Canvas: Artist Ben Quilty*, first published in Mindfood magazine 2008
7 Ben Quilty, Australian Story ABC TV interview, 28 June 2012
8 Ben Quilty, quoted in Art Gallery of New South Wales, Archibald Prize, 2006
11 Lenny Ann Low *The hot seat: Ben Quilty March 17, 2007
12 Ben Quilty, quoted in *Ben Quilty Live! Interpretive Guide*; published by The University of Queensland Art Museum, May 2009.
13 Ben Quilty, quoted in Pearl Lam Galleries to Host Ben Quilty Solo Show, December 2014
14 Ben Quilty, quoted in *Ben Quilty Live! Interpretive Guide*; published by The University of Queensland Art Museum, May 2009.
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18 Ben Quilty, quoted in *The hot seat: Ben Quilty, The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 17, 2007
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23 Ben Quilty, quoted in *The hot seat: Ben Quilty, The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 17, 2007
26 Germaine Greer, School Boy Doodles?, Article: The Guardian, UK, Monday 26th October 2009
28 Art Gallery of South Australia, 2010
Suggested references

Internet:
*The Convergence of Birds*: Ben Quilty Education Kit
Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, 2011

Artist interview about the work in the SAATCHI exhibition
http://prudentialeyawards.com/press/a-cover-satation-with-ben-quilty

Interview with the artist
*Ben Quilty Live* Interpretive Guide
The University of Queensland Art Museum, 2009

Ben Quilty: *After Afghanistan* Interpretive Guide

Quilty’s comments regarding his experiences as an official war artist in Afghanistan in the transcript of “War Paint”, Australian Story: http://www.abc.net.au/austory/content/2012/s3581736.htm

About his Torana car paintings:

2007 article about his Torana car


about the friendship between Ben Quilty and Myuran Sukumaran:

Press Release about his development and receiving the Prudential Award/ Saatchi exhibition

Ben Quilty *After Afghanistan* Exhibition at Griffith University 2014
Education Kit
http://issuu.com/qcagriffith/docs/ben_quilty_education_kit?e=3092855/7585104

MCA Collection: *New Acquisitions* 2007 Education Kit
pages 15-17 are specifically about the Torana cars series
Videos:
Interview with the artist, 2011
Discusses *Inhabit* series and demonstrates creating the sprayed background at Art Gallery of South Australia 12.07 minutes
https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&x-yt-ts=1421828030&v=v5WtttMNii0&x-yt-cl=84411374

*Ben Quilty Live* exhibition At University of Queensland Museum; interview with Curator Lisa Slade 9.38 minutes
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a60mrj1-sJA

*Support for the arts matters to Ben Quilty* 2.24 minutes
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3g1R_qbHDWg

*Ben Quilty and the maggots*: ABC documentary, 2010 27.49 minutes
http://www.abc.net.au/arts/stories/s2872950.htm

Ben Quilty on *New Masculinities in Contemporary Art*, 26 January 2013 Published on Jun 26, 2013 22.10 minutes
“I interviewed Ben Quilty, Australian contemporary artist, winner of the 2011 Archibald Prize and Australian Official War Artist, in January 2013. Amongst other topics, we discussed the idea of masculinity, which is one of the central concerns of his practice. This edition of the StudioCrasher interview focuses on this topic, and includes extensive material on Myuran Sukumaran not previously included in the earlier version of this interview.”
Dr Kit Messham-Muir
The University of Newcastle
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3g1R_qbHDWg

*Ben Quilty at Work* 2.07 minutes
By Andrew Quilty
Published on Apr 13, 2013
Archibald Prize winning artist, Ben Quilty paints Air Commodore John Oddie, AM, CSC in his studio in the NSW southern Highlands, following their meeting during Ben's recent deployment to Afghanistan as Australia's official war artist. Quilty's exhibition, "After Afghanistan" will tour Australia for the next 2 years.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CiXd1V-Smc0

Visual Artist Profile: Ben Quilty 4.49 minutes
Published on Aug 13, 2012
2011 Archibald Prize winner Ben Quilty talks to ArtsCareer about why he decided to pursue a career as an artist and how his practice has developed, particularly since winning the Brett Whiteley Travelling Art Scholarship in 2003.
Discusses his years as a student and jobs he undertook as a student
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xHU4IRiW2U

On his nomination for the Prudential Eye Award 2.14 minutes
Published on Jan 11, 2014
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLFbZWJUTLo
VCE Art, Studio Arts and AusVELS focus questions and Worksheets

Art
Analytical Frameworks

Formal Framework
1. Explain how Quilty’s use of the Rorschach technique has impacted on the interpretation of the meaning of the paintings in this exhibition. What is the effect of having the mirror images?
2. Explain the effect the contrast between the strong figure and the simple white ground makes.
3. Sometimes Quilty suggests that there is ugliness in his paintings and that he is not after traditional beauty. Explain how he has used the elements of line, colour, shape, texture or tone to create unconventional aesthetics.

Personal Framework
1. How has Quilty’s experience of losing two friends to alcohol abuse reflected in Self-portrait smashed Rorschach? How is his depiction of himself in a drunken state similar or different to traditional self-portraits?
2. How does Quilty depict himself as an Australian of Irish descent in Inhabit? Why do you think he has depicted himself alongside Captain James Cook in this sequence of portraits?
3. Explain how his experience of studying indigenous culture has influenced the subject matter in Evening Shadows, Rorschach after Johnston.

Cultural Framework
1. How have historical events Quilty has learnt about through his studies into indigenous cultures impacted on the subject matter depicted in the paintings in this exhibition?
2. In 2001, Quilty, having already completed a degree and certificate, went back to University and studied Bachelor of Visual Communication from the University of Western Sydney, which included a unit in women’s studies. Discuss this quote with reference to his self portrait Self-portrait smashed Rorschach “I became very aware that to understand [the] strange role that I was playing as a young man in my society ... I had to understand contemporary feminist theory.”
3. How does your cultural background influence your viewing of Inhabit?

Contemporary Framework
1. How do Quilty’s artworks challenge the traditional understanding of Australia’s celebration of its discovery by Captain James Cook?
2. Quilty’s style could be seen as Postcolonial as his artwork raises questions about the how Australian history ignores records of atrocities towards indigenous peoples. Compare the readings of Quilty’s Evening Shadows, Rorschach after Johnston with JH Johnstone’s Evening Shadows, backwater of the Murray South Australia.
Studio Arts
Materials and Techniques
1. Compare the use of oil painting between Quilty’s *Evening Shadows, Rorschach after Johnston* and the painting he appropriated, JH Johnstone’s *Evening Shadows, backwater of the Murray South Australia*. What techniques did each artist use and what effect was achieved?
2. Use four descriptive terms to describe his application of paint in the series *Inhabit*.

Communication of Ideas and Meaning
1. How has Quilty conveyed a sense of horror and mystery in the series *Inhabit*? How does this compare with more traditional depictions of Captain James Cook and the idea of the self-portrait?
2. Quilty has taken the canon of the panoramic Australian landscape in *Evening Shadows, Rorschach after Johnston, Fairy Bower Rorschach and Kuta Rorschach No.2* but has changed the meaning from being idealised or peaceful to something else. Explain how Quilty has used subject matter in these three paintings to communicate meaning and compare these paintings to early Australian landscape paintings seen in the Bolton Court in Bendigo Art Gallery.

Influences
1. Like his contemporary and influence, Adam Cullen, Quilty does not glorify his characters. Discuss the ways in which figures in the exhibition are depicted with reference to the non-heroic view of the Australian male.
2. Investigate the paintings of Nicholas Harding and Frank Auerbach. What are the similarities and differences in the three artist’s styles and subject matter?

Historical/ Cultural Contexts
1. As Quilty is an Australian artist, what aspects of the Australian landscape can you see in his work, if any?
2. How does he express his identity as a white male of Irish descent in *Inhabit*? How have his studies into indigenous cultures influenced his subject matter in this sequence of paintings?

Elements of Design/ Aesthetic Qualities
1. Explain how Quilty’s use of analogous colours contributes to an emotional or symbolic effect in *Fairy Bower Rorschach* and *Evening Shadows, Rorschach after Johnston*.
2. What aesthetic qualities are created through Quilty’s use of texture and line in *Kuta Rorschach No 2*?
VCE Art

*View Inhabit*, 2010
Use the **contemporary analytical framework** to interpret this artwork (installation) in terms of its
- presentation
- content/subject matter

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Use the **formal analytical framework** to interpret *Evening Shadows, Rorschach after Johnston* 2011; discuss techniques, formal elements of design and symbolism.

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View *Self-portrait smashed Rorschach* 2009 and *Fairy Bower Rorschach* 2012

Compare their use of the elements of colour, texture and shape
View Self-portrait smashed Rorschach 2009

Discuss how the artist has communicated ideas and meanings in this artwork; in your response, make reference to aesthetic qualities and arts terminology.

View Inhabit 2010

Discuss how the curator of Bendigo Art Gallery may have prepared and presented this artwork. Consider the needs of the artforms of oil painting and wire sculpture in your response.
Discuss how the artist has used **two art elements** to create **aesthetic qualities**.
AusVELS Art Level 9-10 Exploring and Responding

View Inhabit 2010

Discuss with a partner, why you think the artist has depicted himself against Captain James Cook and the skull motif. Write your feelings about the artwork below:

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

What do you think of Quilty’s use of impasto (thick paint) technique to create this series of portraits?

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

View Fairy Bower Rorschach 2012

Discuss how the artist has used two art elements from line, shape, tone, texture or colour to create mood and effect:

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Choose a painting from the exhibition

Title: __________________________________________________ date:_______________________

Discuss how the artist has used one or more principles of design to create a distinctive style: unity, balance, harmony, distortion, abstraction, juxtaposition, contrast, space, hierarchy, level, scale, symmetry/asymmetry, proportion, cropping, repetition, pattern or emphasis:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
AusVELS Art Level 7-8 Exploring and Responding

View *Inhabit* 2010

Discuss what happens throughout the sequence of paintings when viewed from left to right.

What do you think Ben Quilty is expressing about Captain James Cook, the first white man in history to discover Australia? How is this different to what history books usually tell you?

View *Fairy Bower Rorschach* 2012

Discuss his use of colour and texture to create an effect or mood.
Choose a painting from the landscape themed room:

Title: ______________________________________________________ date: ______________________

Draw it in the space below, concentrating on the line and tone you can see: