

**PETER SHARP: WILL TO FORM**  
**Hazelhurst Regional Gallery & Arts Centre**  
**23 March to 6 May 2012**

**Education Kit, Years 7 to 12**

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**About this exhibition**

*Peter Sharp: Will to Form* is a major survey of the artist's practice from 1999 to 2011 including drawings, paintings, prints and sculptures.

The periods covered are:

1999 to 2003: Early work

2003 to 2006: Whale

2006 to 2009: Spider

2009 to 2010: Samothrace

2010 to present: Desert

**Peter Sharp (b 1964)**

Peter Sharp is an abstract artist whose practice has been influenced by Aboriginal ways of seeing; his environment, and a move away from Western linear perspective. Sharp's practice involves a dialogue with different media, and one media tends to inform the other. His earlier practice involved drawing, then deconstructing these drawings to form collages from which paintings emerged. He has now evolved a method of making small scale sculptures upon which drawings are based which in turn give rise to paintings. For the last 15 years he has collaborated with printmaker Brenda Tye who says of Sharp's practice: "For me, what makes Peter Sharp's prints so interesting is the dialogue he creates between the different mediums he works in and the potential for shared insights when the works are finally seen together." (B. Tye, 2012)

Sharp describes himself as "a white toast boy from Cronulla" and, as a surfer and fisherman he did not initially fit the stereotypical image of a black clad art student. Sharp holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales and lectures in painting and drawing at COFA. He is represented by Liverpool Street Gallery, Sydney. Sharp has been awarded *The Kedumba Drawing Award*, 2007 and *The Jacaranda Drawing Prize*, 1996 and has held several residencies including the Cite Internationale des Arts Residency, Paris in 1997. Peter Sharp has exhibited widely and is held in public and private collections in Australia and overseas.

**Process**

Peter Sharp's process involves deconstructing an experience of the subject.

Drawing is the basis of this working process. In earlier work (Whale, Spider series) the drawings come first, and sometimes these drawings are deconstructed into collages, which in turn are studies for paintings. In the series Handle, Sharp has been inspired by the larger

than life-sized hand, now separated from the ancient Greek sculpture Samothrace, housed in the Louvre. Drawings from this sculpture have become the source for the Handle prints and paintings.

A recent trip to Fowler's Gap has inspired sculptural works with found materials. Sharp's practice in the series *Shadowbox: The Desert Paintings*, involves making small-scale sculptures from found objects, such as sticks and rocks, held together with twine and a hot glue gun. These sculptures then became the subject matter for the drawings, which in turn are the studies for the paintings.

The prints are made in collaboration with a printmaker, some have been made with Basil Hall, but for 15 years Sharp has worked in collaboration with printmaker Brenda Tye, who has replicated his surface treatment, hard edges and textured lines through use of carborundum, multiple plates and stencils to create large scale works. Tye says of Sharp's practice:

"... each different media informs the other. The prints effortlessly maintain an ongoing dialogue between the paintings, drawings and sculptures, giving the viewer a rare chance to create, even foster, their own links and connections, while all the time remaining independent. Printing for other artists gives me a rare insight into their practice. For me, what makes Peter Sharp's prints so interesting is the dialogue he creates between the different mediums he works in and the potential for shared insights when the works are finally seen together."(B.Tye, 2012)

The large scale sculptures are made of timber from a property in Walcha, and Sharp has achieved surface patterning and textures with a chain saw. The sculptures are often cut into smaller pieces and then reassembled. This makes them easier to carry.

Sharp's paintings are made on sized Belgian linen and the surface treatment involves layers of mediums such as ink, oil and acrylic paint, in both impasto and washes. There is a contrast between the fluid shapes and solid geometric forms, each creating a layer of form. The elements of texture, colour, scale, balance and composition set up the play between geometric and organic patterns, often symbolic. In the composition, formal shapes act as a device to 'pin down' the organic shapes. The viewer is challenged to draw their own interpretation.

### **Links to the Curriculum**

The exhibition *Peter Sharp: Will to Form* is a survey exhibition of the practice of contemporary artist Peter Sharp, including paintings, drawings, prints and sculptures. *Peter Sharp: Will to Form* Education Kit contains background information on the exhibition, artist biographical information, a brief description of the artist's processes, a Glossary of art terms, and questions relating to the Visual Arts Syllabus.

This Education Kit makes links to the Visual arts Syllabus Years 7 to 12, by providing information about the artist's practice, questions regarding the frames and agencies of the artworld. Suggestions for artmaking activities are also included.

### ***Peter Sharp: Will to Form***

#### **Art Study**

Please use these questions, looking at the exhibition or images from the catalogue.

### **Looking at the Artworks: Years 7 to 12**

1 Are there any colours and shapes which recur in this exhibition more than others? How do the formal geometric shapes work with the expressive organic shapes to create a pictorial tension?

2 Make a list of the expressive forms and media used by the artist.

3 What elements in the paintings and drawings are the same? What elements in the paintings and drawings are different?

4 Look at Sharp's sculptures: What material has he used? Discuss size, shape, colour and surface treatment.

5 How would you describe the style of Peter Sharp's artwork: realistic, stylised, abstract? Why?

### **The Frames: Years 9 to 12**

#### **Subjective Frame**

6 Look at *India* 1999, acrylic and oil on linen, 182 x 210 cm. Discuss the size, shapes, lines, and use of colour. How does this reflect his feeling about the subject?

7 Look at *Sounding* 2005, acrylic and oil on linen, 182 x 210 cm. Sharp was thinking about whales under water, diving deep. Look at line, colour, shape, texture. How does it make you feel?

8 Look at the paintings *See\_saw* 2003-2006 and *Mirage* 2011. How has the artist used colour, tone, and line (horizon) differently, to reflect a different feeling for the places of sea and desert? How do these works make you feel?

#### **Structural Frame**

9 Look at *Darwin I – VIII*, 2000, multiplate coloured etching, 17 x 14.5 cm each.

What do you see? Describe subject matter, shape, line, colour. Describe how the artist, using a limited colour scheme, small-scale size and simplified shapes, created a feeling of investigating nature. What significance does the title give this work?

10 *Desert Map*, 2002, acrylic and oil on linen, 182 x 210 cm. Look at the elements: line, colour, shape - both organic and geometric. How are signs and symbols used to give meaning to the subject matter?

11 *Heads or Tails*, 2005, woodcut on carborundum print on six sheets, 134 x 267 cm.

Describe how colour, scale, texture and symbols inform us about the plight of the whale. (The segments with letters that carve up the whale, is from a C19th illustration of how to dissect the blubber from a whale.)

12 *Bearing*, 2006, six pieces of hand-sawn timber and found stone, painted and assembled. Draw it. What do you notice about texture, scale, shape, colour? What type of spider is this? It is made of multiple parts. Why?

#### **Cultural Frame**

13 Look at the sculptures of Peter Sharp. Find artistic influences from past styles eg Brancusi, Robert Klippel. What signs and symbols can you find of modernist practice in his sculpture?

14 How has Sharp's painting style referenced the work of Indigenous art? Look at the work of Paddy Bedford and Rover Thomas. Consider view point, layering, the influence of place, the move away from western linear perspective and the use of signs and symbols.

15 Look at *Close to the Bone* 2006, acrylic and oil on linen, 182 x 210 cm. Peter Sharp's personal culture involves fishing and surfing, a sea and beach lifestyle in Sutherland Shire, surrounded by water ways. What signs of these interests do you see in this painting?

### **Postmodern Frame**

16 Look at *Handle*, charcoal drawings 2009-10. Consider how Sharp has used the hand from the ancient Greek sculpture Winged Nike of Samothrace as inspiration for this artwork. How does the process of abstraction transform the subject?

17 Discuss how Peter Sharp uses layering of reduced forms, creating works that are abstractions of the landscape, their meaning determined by the audience.

### **Conceptual Framework: Years 11 & 12**

18 According to Andrew Frost: "Sharp's biomorphic forms are abstractions of and reactions to the landscape." (A. Frost, *Just Enough in Peter Sharp: Will to Form*, cat 2012)

Explain how the audience engages with and understands Sharp's art work with reference to this statement. (artwork, world, audience)

19 Comment on Peter Sharp's enthusiasm for the subject, the relationship between the different expressive forms, how one informs the other, and his use of signs and symbols. (artist/artwork/structural frame)

20 Consider at least two sculptures, describe their formal qualities (line, shape, colour, size, direction, texture). What does their size suggest, and the placement of sculptures near each other? How does the audience respond? What do you think the artist was trying to say? (artwork/ structural frame/ Audience)

### **Art Making Activity**

#### **Exercise 1**

Go for a walk and collect twigs, leaves, rocks. Arrange these in the sunlight on a sheet of paper. Draw the shadows in charcoal. Remove the objects and draw each one as a line drawing, treating each object as a transparent object. Use an eraser to partially remove some of these shapes, so that the shadow remains the dominant tone.

#### **Exercise 2**

Identify the most interesting parts of your drawings with a view finder, or tear them up and reassemble. Use this detail or collage as the source for a painting, perhaps adding a geometric shape to create balance in the composition. Use stains, impasto paint and line work to create a work with varied textures.

#### **Exercise 3**

Using the collected objects, assemble at least 3 small sculptures, holding the parts together with a hot glue gun and string. These sculptures may become the subject matter for a series of drawings, repeating exercises one and two.

#### **Exercise 4**

Deconstruct the painting in step 2 into a series of small paintings, each using an element from the original work, or investigating different aspects of the material practice, such as impasto and texture, pattern and stain, line, colour and shape.

## **Glossary**

- abstract – reduction or simplification of forms to one of non-representation
- body of work – a collection of artworks by an artist
- carborundum – a fine grit, which when attached to a plate can be inked and printed in relief to produce a textured surface which is capable of a dense blackness.
- deconstruction – a means of interpretation that regards a work as an open and many-layered network of the most varied elements in form and content. These elements, their functions and contradictions, are revealed by deconstruction. (Holzwarth, Hans Werner (2008). *Art Now*, Vol. 3. Taschen. p. 578.)
- en plein air – French term meaning “in the open air”, painting outdoors
- etching – a print made from a plate that is etched by acid. The ink in the etched lines is transferred onto a sheet of dampened paper by pressure of a printing press.
- evocative – tending to inspire memories
- expressionistic – a style of art drawing on the artist’s feelings
- expressive forms – different areas of media used to make art eg painting, drawing, sculpture
- calligraphy – pleasing hand writing, literally ‘beautiful brush marks”
- fauna – the animal life of a region
- flora – the plants of a region
- idealised – to represent something in perfect form as imagined
- impasto – paint applied thickly
- incised – carved into
- media – materials used
- monoprint – a one-off impression taken from a surface where ink has been applied. The print is not repeated in an edition.
- Modern – a period in art, usually thought to begin with the Realists in the 1860s and ending with Pop Art in the 1970s.
- texture – the look or feel of a surface. This can be real or created by pattern.
- stylised – made according to a set of rules, between abstraction and realism
- survey – a selection of artworks, taking in the full range of the artist’s output