

# Ruark Lewis: Survey 1982 – 2012

Hazelhurst Regional Galley & Arts Centre

29<sup>th</sup> September – 11<sup>th</sup> November 2012

## Education Kit: K to 6

Contents:

About this Exhibition

Ruark Lewis, brief Artist Biography

Process

Pre-visit Activities

Post-visit Activities

Artworks and Questions

Glossary of Terms

References

---

## About this exhibition

*Ruark Lewis: Survey 1982-2012* curated by historian Dr James Paull, is the first mid-career survey of Sydney-based artist and writer Ruark Lewis. Working for over three decades, Lewis has established an international reputation across an extraordinary range of creative genres. This exhibition displays a sample of his multi-disciplinary work from paintings, drawings and installations to performance, theatre and audio-video works.

The exhibition also includes Lewis' most recent series *Star Shelters* (2012) in Hazelhurst gardens. These Star Shelters, which are prisms and are influenced by the stars of the night sky, invite the viewer to engage, interact, perform and play in and around them. Another participatory work displayed is *Catscradle*, a collaborative work between the artist and audience. Throughout the duration of the exhibition families are invited to make their own string art in Hazelhurst Foyer.

Collaboration is a key aspect of Lewis' artistic practice and this exhibition highlights some of his varied collaborations. Lewis' large-scale installation *Homeland Illuminations* is one of his many artistic partnerships with Australian artist Jonathan

Jones and the composer Rik Rue.

*Ruark Lewis: Survey 1982-2012* at Hazelhurst is to be the first of two shows providing a full 'Lewis experience'. Phase two of the survey show will be held at the Macquarie University Gallery (30 January 2012 – 13 March 2013).

## **Ruark Lewis (b 1960)**

Ruark Lewis is a visual artist and writer renowned for his practice of linking art, poetics and politics. He creates in a wide range of media such as painting, drawing, installation, artist's-books, public art, theatre, performance, audio-video works. He often works in artistic collaborations with other poets, composers, choreographers, anthropologists, writers and visual artists in a method that he calls *transcription drawing*.

Through this unique practice Lewis says he makes "quoted references to everyone else's works in my art". (Lewis 2012).

Describing himself a "language artist" (Lewis 2012), Lewis completed his studies at Sydney College of the Arts in 1984. Lewis has won many public art commissions such as *Relay* an art installation for the Sydney Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Festivals, 2000 and *Residence* for Randwick City Council, 2010. Lewis has held several residencies including the Cite Internationale des Arts, Paris in 1991, Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs in 1997 and Hazelhurst Regional Gallery & Arts Centre, 2007. Lewis exhibited at Hazelhurst Regional Gallery in *Our Lucky Country (difference)* in 2006, and *Our Lucky Country (still different)* in 2007. In 2006, Lewis exhibited in the 15<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney at the Museum of Contemporary Art. Ruark Lewis has exhibited widely and his works are held in public and private collections in both in Australia and overseas. He is represented by Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne.

## **Process**

Ruark Lewis is an artist who moves with ease between disciplines, defying categorization. He works in an extraordinary range of genres in an effort to present the expressive possibilities of language – both written and visual. The mediums he works across include drawing, painting, sculpture, performance, installations and audio-video. Lewis has created a unique technique which he calls *transcription drawing*. Lewis uses poetry and language extensively in his art to communicate to the audience. Put simply, "Ruark Lewis puts letters on canvas and paper, on walls, sticks, and even books." (Selenitsch, 2007)

Lewis refers to himself a "language artist". He says he does not want to be "locked into one single artistic area" otherwise the poetic nature of his work is denied. He

uses language as a playful way to engage people and “hook them back to the work” (Lewis, 2012). Many of Lewis’ works seem to present accidental arrangements of letters even though they are much more. This sensitive linguistic elusiveness has the ability to appeal to a diverse audience – most people can identify letters. Lewis’ made-up language can appeal to everyone, no matter what language is spoken, level of reading ability or knowledge of poetry. People can make their own entries into the narratives of his texts. The elements of texture, colour, line, shape combine with the principles of balance, contrast and rhythm in each of Lewis’ works. This establishes a play between geometric and organic patterns, creating another layer to the language.

When creating, Lewis follows a method of looking, listening, reading and then responding to already existing poems, music and visual material. He asks his audience to follow a similar process in their engagement and interaction with his works. As is similar with most contemporary art or poetry, the viewer is challenged to draw their own understandings of the work.

Collaborative partnership is a significant aspect of Lewis’ practice. In addition to his partnerships with composers, musicians, dancers, authors, poets and anthropologists, Lewis has joined forces with many fellow artists.

## **EDUCATION K to 6**

### **Pre-visit activities:**

1. Discuss some gallery rules with reasons why. State the positive behaviour you want at the gallery.
2. Pre-visit familiarisation with the artworks to be viewed: reproduce images from education package and display in the classroom. This will aid the child’s connection to the work once they enter the exhibition.
3. Discuss some of the art terms found under Glossary of Terms.
4. Programming ideas are linked to outcomes from the Visual Arts syllabus for teachers.

### **Post-visit activities:**

1. Post-visit activities at school should involve the step of display and critique. Children should be encouraged to use positive art talk when discussing others’ work and ‘art talk’ (see glossary of terminology) to describe it.
2. Suggested activities are listed beneath each work.

## **Artwork: *Star Shelters 2012***

Ruark Lewis creates designs with dots on paper, linked to astronomy and stories of the night skies (everyone can relate to this because we can all look up!). Dots provide points from which straight lines radiate and connect to other dots. These 2 – dimensional designs are painted black and white (stripes) and some red and white. Lewis has then used 4 segments, folding them along adjoining lines to create a 3-dimensional work.

Inspired by the Merzbau constructions of German Dada artist Kurt Schwitters and the night sky from a reserve in North Eastern Arnhem Land, the designs are a gift of appreciation to the people of the City of Darwin as shelters.



**Subject: PLACES AND SPACES**

### **Appreciating activities:**

**Look** at this artwork by Ruark Lewis. **Explore** this installation- where is it? What lines and shapes (natural or man-made) do we see?

**Discuss:** What colours we see and what attracts our attention? Can they move? Can we get inside them? Do they provide a temporary shelter?

### **Making Activities:**

**Imagine you are an astronomer. Discuss** the position of the stars and planets. Map them on a sheet of paper, by **Drawing** as dots. Use a ruler to link dots. Then fill newly created shapes with stripes of B& W or any combination of contrasting colours, again using your ruler and pencil. Cut out four of the adjoining shapes and fold along the lines, securing with tape to create your own hand-made crystal structures. **Display and discuss** their formal qualities: line, colour, shape, size, rhythm, balance and the contrasts created by the angles and lines. Do these sculptural models look like anything in particular? Give them a name.

### **Artwork: *Homeland Illuminations* 2007 (with Jonathan Jones)**

This is a large collaboration with the Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi urban Aboriginal artist Jonathan Jones, using overlapping beams on the floor to create a raft-like vessel with a series of biographical texts. Written upon the work are the stories of Jones' grandfather. Jones has illuminated the work from below. The work conveys issues on identity and Jones' cultural heritage of his family.



**Subject: PEOPLE**

#### **Appreciating activities:**

**Look** at this installation. Aboriginal artists believe that their stories are sacred and private and that revealing them brings bad luck. **Explore** this work: what shapes, colours and direction stand out? **Discuss** how this artwork was made (look at the painted surface and describe it). **Write** a story about your family.

#### **Making Activities:**

**Write** a story about your family, or where you come from and a story about who you are, using a selection of five different coloured papers. **Make a collage** by cutting out the lines of text and rearranging them into alternate lines of text. **Explore** how you can disguise your story. (Be selective about which lines you use).

**Display** your collages and **discuss** how they are linked to a particular place or a family story and who you are. Can the class pick which collage belongs to which student?

**Artwork: Yellow water drawing, transcription of Rain Phrases from T.G.H. Strehlow, Journal 10a, 1935 (detail) 1997, oil on canvas.**



**Subject: OBJECTS**

**Appreciating activities:**

**Look** at this artwork by Ruark Lewis. Lewis makes 'transcription drawings' by laying tracing paper over existing artworks and tracing the negative space between the marks. **Discuss** how Lewis made this artwork (look at the surface and describe it). Can you see any words? **Explore** this work: what shapes, colours, textures and direction stand out?

**Making Activities:**

Place tracing paper over a copy of an artwork and trace its negative spaces (the spaces in between). **Paint** using blue, white and two colours, creating patterns and shapes. **Display** paintings and **discuss** how they are linked to original artwork. How does the texture and surface look?

**OR**

Using some text, **Draw** the words large across the page in pencil, then overdraw in orange crayon. **Colour** the negative shapes using yellow crayon. **Write** over the top of the orange text quickly and unevenly in red, then draw over the yellow background in orange or blue. This creates new textures and shapes. **Display** drawings and **discuss** how they are linked to original words. How does the texture and surface look?

## **Glossary of Terms**

Association - to work in a co-operative partnership

Collaboration - to work jointly

Collage – a single artwork made up of an arrangement of different images or materials

Elements of art - Texture, colour, line, shape, tone, size, direction

Elusiveness – Difficult to define or describe; vague.

Geometric – Based on man-made forms or shapes; angular, straight lines, precise, rigid

Graphite - another term for lead pencil

Illuminating - to use light to make brighter or to make a decorative picture from someone else's writings

Installation – a work consisting of an arrangement of objects, artworks, films etc, created for a particular site or gallery, generally created within the environment

Interactive - where the audience and work can act on each other. In this case, visitors can play, climb on and hide in the prisms

Negative space-The space around an object

Organic – Based on natural forms or shapes; curved, flowing, irregular

Pattern – An artistic or decorative design made up of an arrangement of repeated parts

Performance means using the human body in action in creating an artwork. This may involve movement and/or speech.

Principles of design - Balance, contrast, rhythm, harmony and dominance

Prism – A geometric solid shape (generally triangular) whose two ends are similar, equal and parallel and sides are parallelograms.

Shelter – Anything serving as a place of protection from things such as danger or bad weather; may also serve as a living environment.

Survey - an exhibition of artworks selected from a period of the artist's practice, in this case the years 1980 to 2010.

Transcription – A term created by the artist Ruark Lewis to describe his drawing practice. This include the process of tracing the negative shapes of an existing work; recording the sounds of music or poetry through lines and patterns

## References

Lewis, R (2012) *Unpublished interview with Ruark Lewis* at the artist's studio (28/ 07/ 2012), for Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre. Interview conducted by Kate Milner and Marisa van Eijk.

Paull, J (2012) *Transcription for the Perfect House: The Art of Ruark Lewis*, catalogue essay for Ruark Lewis Survey: 1982-2012 at Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre (20/09/2012 – 11/11/2012)

Selenitsch, A (2007) Words, words, words: Mike Brown, Rose Nolan, Ruark Lewis, *Artlink*, Vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 50-54