

DAVID RANKIN

Works 1967–2004



EDUCATION KIT

Information and Practical ideas for group visits:

BACKGROUND Notes

GLOSSARY

ACTIVITY GUIDE for Years 5-6 & Years 7-9

ACTIVITY GUIDE for Years 10 -12 & Tertiary Students

REFERENCES, SOURCES & Acknowledgements

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Image: David Rankin, *Prophesy Study*, Gouache & Watercolour on Paper, 21x15cm, c. 1996 Collection the Artist



Tweed River Art Gallery



INTRODUCTION AND STRUCTURING YOUR VISIT

Welcome from the Tweed River Art Gallery to the David Rankin Touring Exhibition. This Kit is an education resource which aims to assist you in carrying out a successful visit to the exhibition.

It is divided into three sections. The first part are notes for teachers and students on the artist, his personal history, sources of influence and themes in his work. It also features a glossary of terms which includes sources of inspiration for the artist and terms found in the text in the Catalogue by the Curator Dore Ashton. Through the document these terms are highlighted in bold.

The second part is activities for students in upper primary grade 5-6 and lower secondary years 7-9: *Junior*. The third part is for upper secondary years 10-12 and tertiary Visual Arts Students: *Senior*. (Tertiary students of Philosophy and Theology may also be interested in the themes in the exhibition.) There are a broad choice of questions in both these sections to cater for the diverse age range. It is intended that this would allow teachers to tailor the visit to their students needs and select just the activities which they wish their students to answer or discuss. The activities are structured to be undertaken during and after your visit.

For further information about David Rankin and images refer to the Catalogue for the exhibition with texts by the Curator Dore Ashton and Frédéric-Yves Jeannet as well as the list of sources and web sites found at the end of this document. We hope you enjoy the exhibition!

David Rankin, **Ladder**, 1999, charcoal & wash on paper, 21x21.5cm. Collection the Artist



PERSONAL HISTORY

David Rankin was born in Britain in 1946 and migrated to Australia as a child in 1949. In 1989 he moved to New York where he now lives with his wife the poet and novelist, Lily Brett and their three children. He is a self taught artist and trained as a teacher. He moved to Sydney from the bush in 1967 where he began painting and secured his first exhibition through Watters gallery at age 22. In 1983 he won the Wynne Prize for landscape at the Art Gallery of NSW and he is now represented in many public and private collections.

In 1979 his first wife died leaving him with a young child. In the same year he subsequently met his second and current wife Lily Brett, whose own life was etched by tragedy with her parent survivors of the Holocaust. She too migrated to Australia as a child after the Second World War in 1948. The artist recounts that his empathy for Lily and the pity for his first wife's death fused into what he calls "the dark blessing of my life."¹ The darkness was transformed into images. The author Dore Ashton writes that the events of 1979 and the fire which ravished his studio in 1997 and burnt his art works and many personal possessions, had a profound impact on his work. From 1997 he became more interested in mortality and the works after the fire were called 'existentialist.'

His life experiences have been transformed into images in various ways across his body of works from 1967 to 2004. His paintings are like contemplations of things seen and experienced. Just some examples of this are his Jerusalem series which followed a trip to Jerusalem in 1988, which then led to his Golgotha works. His travels to the Australian, American and Mexican deserts became the subject matter for many of his canvases, such as **Ridge – Mungo, Golden Prophecy – San Antonio, Grey Sonora Landscape** and then led to his **Witness Series**. From the fire in his studio he then painted **Buddha and Flames**. He illustrated a book by Lily Brett on the holocaust and explored the theme further in his huge work **The Drowned and The Saved** from a book by Primo Levi of the same name. Through Brett he encountered Jewish mythology and painted **Black Menorah** and **Black Tfilin** and like a testament to his love for her created his Husband and Wife Series including **Husband and Wife Triptych III**, and **Husband and Wife – Ying and Yang**.

INFLUENCES & LANDSCAPE PAINTING

In discussing his paintings from the late 60s and early 70s David Rankin cites Mark Toby and Paul Klee as influences, "both used all over techniques, all-over compositions. When you look at a Mark Toby from the 1950s you see an all over distribution of relatively equal weight, and calligraphic signs. That's really where I came from."² Devoted to Paul Klee who suggested there could be a visual language as precise as poetry, he also cites Lloyd Rees, Tony Tuckson and John Olsen as mentors. He enjoyed watching their hands work and their bodies engage

with a surface. He was informed also by the way Ian Fairweather created meditative abstractions. Fairweather lived in Shanghai for four years and combined Asian and western styles in his work with a restrained palette.

On the inspiration for his spotted paintings and abstracted landscapes, Rankin attributes the following sources. From his experience as a child growing up in the outback and country towns he knew the Australian landscape very well. His "severely abbreviated markings to denote landscape" came from his passion for the styles of the painters Fred Williams, John Olsen, Sidney Nolan and Ian Fairweather. He recalls in their backgrounds you would see "edited little markings to suggest landscape foliage – pattern. The other source of my spotted-ness was Paul Klee, in his scattered calligraphic painting often there would be spots all the way through his canvas, all through his images. So I was very influenced by his use of spotting."³ The third source was **Chinese Chan painting** (See overleaf *Spiritual Themes*). "So my simple logic was, if I take these elements of Australian landscape painting that I love in Nolan and Williams and add this element of oriental sparseness and singularity; if I concentrate on these notes of animation, then I will have paintings filled with life spirit and the essence of landscape. For me the essence of landscape was that your eye drifts over it, from one point to another."⁴

Ashton says "before he shaped his visual language he had read widely."⁵ He drew inspiration from Eastern and Western traditions, ancient Chinese and Japanese poetry and calligraphy including **Japanese Haiku**, writing from the **Kaballah, Aramaic texts**, Buddhism, and theories of philosophy including **existentialism** a title he gives to his recent body of work from 2003-2004 such as **Elemental Union** and **Many Rooms**, calling them his 'Existentialist works.'

ABSTRACTION

Abstraction is an ideal symbolic language for David Rankin as it is non literal, contemplative and opens up an exploration of ideas. On abstraction as his chosen means of expression he says "there is a distinction between painting a person who is passionate, or painting a person who is meditating, and painting what I hope to be an image that would induce *that state in the viewer*. I don't want to paint a descriptive image of somebody else, I want to induce that in the viewer. ... If I paint a person in a state of passion,...or meditation, then I am already distancing my viewer from that...my approach is more like the program of music. ...music induces that state directly."⁶ Denying being exclusively influenced by Abstract Expressionism he says he was more interested in Japanese and Chinese Zen painting. Particularly **Chan Buddhist Painting**, and the '**flung ink**' school of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

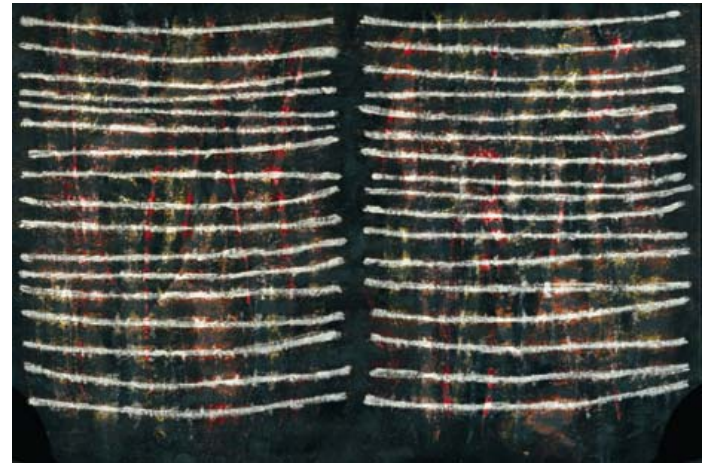
SPIRITUAL & RELIGIOUS THEMES

Spiritual concepts are at the core of many of David Rankin's artworks. From his early observations of nature and the power of the landscape to his studies of Zen Buddhism, Asian philosophy and mysticism, Judaism, the Kaballah, and Christianity the artist has explored universal themes from the depth of human experience to the search for meaning. Using a polarity of elements: black juxtaposed with white; large areas of space contrasted with tiny shapes; heavily worked backgrounds with spontaneously dashed surfaces; negative spaces competing with positive spaces; and playful brightly coloured works on paper beside large, dark, brooding canvases; he conveys light and dark, tragedy and hope, despair and peace, his work bares witness to common mystical world views that the "universe comprises paired opposites (male-female, light-dark, vertical-horizontal, positive-negative)."⁷

Rankin is compelled by an Eastern aesthetic, and has explored Eastern Religion, Philosophy, Painting, Literature and calligraphy. He literally imbues his work including **Stone Progressions** and the **Sonora Desert** series with Qi/ Ch'i or "life spirit" by painting spots inspired by **Chinese Chan Painting**, he says "If you look at Chinese and Japanese landscape painting there's an element which they call **Qi** – life spirit – in the painting, and this is the spotting."⁸ He was interested in Haiku, a type of Japanese Poetry often practised by Zen Buddhist monks and sometimes known as 'play verse'. Within the perimeters of 3 lines of 17 syllables the poet would create what are sometimes considered beautiful word pictures as demonstrated in Rankin's painting **Willow eyebrows**. The uplifting power of nature is evidenced in his **Elements** series where the "epiphany is suggested by heat, fire or light."⁹

Jerusalem also lent itself to his interest in theology and history. He was amazed by Jerusalem, a site of Jewish, Christian, Arab, Turkish, and Roman history with all the turbulence that each of these diverse beliefs imply. To represent its layered rich history he focussed in on a detail - its doors and alley ways with their markings of life scratched in over centuries. He used figuration in his **Jerusalem Series** where one can recognise imagery- posts, lintels, doors, windows. He enhanced the texture of the works by adding layers of paper pulp to the canvases. He also introduced a wavering white line to break up the picture plane, to frame the work. He calls it his "line of survival."¹⁰

Some of his titles explicitly link the works to theology, the old testament, new testament and spirituality such as **Red Jacobs Ladder**, the **Onement** series, **Buddha Bending**, **Buddha and Flames** and the **Prophecy** works. So to in **Golgotha** (Calvary) he explores spiritual beliefs. **Golgotha** is a place loaded with meaning and of significance for Jews and Christians alike. In **Aramaic Golgotha** – means skull, and is a place where Jews bury their dead. They believe that when the first drop of blood from the Messiah falls on the hill of the skull it will cause the dead to arise and unite with their loved ones and families. In the works his imagery is of moons, stones and skulls. Golgotha is also known as Calvary where Christ was crucified. Primarily his images of Golgotha depict tragedy and community – families united in life, love and death. In the **Prophecy** series the reference is to a passage in Ezekiel from the Old Testament where there is a



David Rankin, **Black Prophecy Diptych** 1998 Acrylic on linen 162 x 238.5cm
Collection Adrian Slinger Galleries

valley of dry bones, through prayer the lord gives them flesh breathing life into the bones so that the dead rise up and follow the Lord to the land of Israel. The passage is also one of the few biblical references to painting.

His spiritual themes are further expressed in the **Dona Nobis Pacem** works where he wanted to create an image of souls seeking peace. Prior to the series he had painted souls in conflict, torment, distress and he says he wanted to give them some peace. The background is a vibrant black, with points of light which Ashton describes as "votive candles, their burning oil emanating an aura of white light."¹¹ The Series was born from his encounter with Kaballah and particularly the Book of Splendour by the highly poetic mystic of the 13th century Moses de Lyon. Rankin initially dubbed them the "black light series" exploring the concept, there is no light without darkness. The **Kaballah** has inspired many artists and writers. In the language of the Kaballah there "is always images & colors"¹² its creation myth includes the Godhead (Ein Sof) creating light and colour.

There is darkness in Rankin's work however there is also joy. Painting for him is a celebration of life- and it will long out live him. He draws on the meditative qualities found in abstraction to convey his meanings. His work is expressive and emotive. It reveals personal tragedy and experience, explores poignant ideas and themes, concepts of life and death, the complexity of the holocaust and universal themes of the human spirit.

END NOTES

1. Ashton, Dore *The walls of the heart: the work and life of David Rankin*. Wein: Verlag Christian Brandstatter, 2001, p.16
2. Bleiker, Roland *Abstracting the political: David Rankin interviewed by Roland Bleiker in Brisbane on 18 June (2001)* *Social Alternatives*, v.20, no.4, Oct 2001: p. 18
3. *ibid*, p. 19
4. *Ibid*, p. 19
5. Ashton, Op. Cit. p. 10
6. Bleiker, Op Cit. p. 17
7. Tuchman, Morris ed. *The Spiritual in Art* idem. *Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art*, Abbeville Press Los Angeles 1986, p19.
8. Bleiker, Op Cit. p.19
9. Tuchman, Op. Cit. p. 18
10. Ashton, Op. Cit. p. 22
11. Ashton, Dore "After the Fire" in *David Rankin Works 1967-2004* Exhibition Catalogue, Tweed River Gallery, 2005 , p. 5
12. Ashton, Op. Cit. ,p.30

TERMS & SOURCES OF INFLUENCE

ARAMAIC - The language in which the Talmud is written, also used in many other Jewish texts. [The Talmud is Judaism's holiest book (actually a collection of books)].

CHINESE CHAN PAINTING FLUNG INK SCHOOL - the poet/priest/painter would, in a state of inebriation, splash ink on a roll of paper or silk on the floor and then, when not inebriated, build an image from those splashes.

CHUANG-TZU - Was a Chinese Philosopher (c. 4th Century BC). Like Heraclitus he accepted the reality of constant flux, and the full reality of physical death. He did not believe in any creator God or afterlife, but he did believe in an underlying Tao, Way or One, from which the Heaven and Earth derived. This One transfused everything in the universe from the lowest to the highest. The individual could attain mystical unity with this One by achieving complete emptiness or *hsü* - a timeless state free of worries or selfish desires. He believed life should be enjoyed while it lasts, and death should not be feared.

CORUSCATING - sparkling

DONA NOBIS PACEM - translated from the Latin as grant us peace/ give us peace or let there be peace. This is also found as a blessing in a Catholic Mass.

EXISTENTIALISM - Philosophical theory emphasizing the existence of the individual as a free and self-determining agent. The suffering human being must create meaning in an unknowable, chaotic, godless and seemingly empty universe. Jean Paul Sartre is probably the most famous representative.

ELEMENTAL - Refers to the world as interpreted through the elements: air, earth, fire, and water.

HERACLITUS - is probably the most significant philosopher (c.500BC) of ancient Greece until Socrates and Plato and is considered fundamental in the formation of the European mind. He postulated a model of nature and the universe which created the foundation for all other speculation on physics and metaphysics. The ideas that the universe is in constant change and that there is an underlying order or reason to this change forms the essential foundation of the European world view. He talks of the paired opposites in the universe and was known as the "flux and fire" philosopher.

GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA - Is a 15th century Renaissance sage and philosopher, who wrote the *Oration on the Dignity of Man* considered a kind of manifesto of the Renaissance. Eloquenty written it focuses attention on human capacity and the human perspective. His work synthesizes all the strains of Renaissance and late medieval thinking: Neoplatonism, humanism, Aristoteleanism, Averroism (a form of Aristoteleanism), and mysticism.

KABBALAH - an esoteric theosophy of rabbinical origin based on the Hebrew scriptures and developed between the 7th and 18th centuries. A body of mystical lore and scriptural interpretation, developed by the Kabbalists, who through study and meditative speculation sought communion with God.

GOLGOTHA - Meaning skull in Aramaic, also known as Calvary the site of Christ's crucifixion

HAIKU - Haiku is a type of Japanese Poetry often practised by Zen Buddhist monks and sometimes known as 'play verse' where there are a total of 17 syllables- with 5 syllables in the first line 7 in the second and 5 in the third. Within these perimeters the poet would create what are sometimes considered beautiful word pictures. Much symbolism was used, puns and often an indirect reference to the Season.

INEFFABLE - too great for description in words

JACOB'S LADDER - A Hebrew patriarch (son of Isaac, and ancestor of the Jews), who in a vision saw a ladder reaching up to heaven. Jacob is also called Israel.

LI PO & TU FU - Li Po and Tu Fu are famous Chinese Poets and Social Critics. Li Po was an Imagist poet who used the simplest of words and phrases to paint a delicate and expressive verbal picture. Where Li Po was Taoist in spirit Tu Fu was devoutly Confucian. Tu Fu was deeply moved by the sorrow of his troubled times. His poems speak of the sad fate of the people, and his hatred of war.

MENORAH - is a 7-stick candle holder, typically with one holder higher or different than the others. It is one of the oldest symbols of the Jewish faith, considered a symbol of the nation of Israel and its mission to be "a light unto the nations." (Isaiah 42:6) The sages emphasize that light is not a violent force; Israel is to accomplish its mission by setting an example, not by using force. This is highlighted in the vision in Zechariah 4:1-6. who sees a menorah, and God explains: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit." In synagogues, there is often a light above the ark, which symbolizes the menorah.

OCCIDENTAL - of the West

ONEMENT - The state of being one or reconciled.

QI - The Chinese character for *qi* (*ch'i*) is usually translated into English as "vital energy" or "life force," although its literal meaning is "breath."

PASCAL'S WAGER - is Blaise Pascal's application of decision theory to the belief in God. It is one of three 'wagers' which appear in his *Penses* a collection of notes on Christian apologetics (a reasoned defense). Pascal argues that it is always a better "bet" to believe in God, because the expected value to be gained from believing in God is always greater than the expected value resulting from non-belief.

SATORI - Satori is the spiritual goal of Zen Buddhism. Satori roughly translates into individual Enlightenment, or a flash of sudden awareness. Satori is an intuitive experience and a deep experience of infinite space.

SPIRIT - Vital animating essence of a person or animal. A rational or intelligent being without a material body.

STEVENS, WALLACE - One of Rankin's favourite poets who talks of the state of the soul and celebrates imagination.

TALMUDIC - Body of Jewish law and legend.

TENEBOUS - dark gloomy

TFILN (Tefillin) - also called phylacteries, are leather objects used in Jewish prayer, containing Biblical verses.

WRAITH - ghost

ACTIVITIES PRIMARY 5-6 & SECONDARY 7-9

1. What are your first impressions as you enter the exhibition? What can you see?

2. Look at the work **Two Figures- Huertas**. Can you describe the two figures in the work? What are they doing? Imagine they are talking to each other what do you think they are saying? (Think about the colour, what mood does it convey?)

3. Rankin says he uses spots in his paintings as he was inspired by Australian Landscape painters such as Fred Williams, the Expressionist Paul Klee's calligraphic use of spots and the third source was Chinese Chan painting. "If you look at Chinese and Japanese landscape painting there's an element which they call Qi – life spirit – in the painting, and this is the spotting." Find the paintings where you can see the "life spirit" – or spots?

4. **Claypan** is almost a figurative work with patterns like cracked earth. Draw a small section of this work in a 10cmx10cm square. Paste the square on a larger sheet of paper and then extend the lines (a bit like *Mr Squiggle*) to create a new figurative work.

5. Rankin's work explores spirituality, history, philosophy and human experience and throws up many opposites giving the work its tension and balance. In spiritual & philosophical thought paired opposites are considered central to the universe. As you look at the exhibition see if you can match a painting to each of these groupings?

Light and Dark	Above and Beneath
Joy and Despair	Abstract and Figurative
Surface and depth	Life and death
Hidden and Exposed	Male and Female

6. Abstraction is Rankin's chosen means of expression as it opens up interpretation of the work and can capture things which can't be seen such as energy, spirit, or the essence of a landscape. Use your different senses to explore the work **Yellow Sonora** and **Golgotha Dream Diptych**. If they were edible what flavour would they be? If they were scented what do they smell like? If they were making a noise what sounds can you hear? If you could touch them what do they feel like?

7. In 1988 the artist visited Jerusalem and painted his **Jerusalem series**. It is a very old city. In his works he painted the walls, doorways, steps, alleys which show the markings of the passing of generations. Looking at these works – Describe the texture of the work? How has he made the marks on the canvas? What colours has the artist used? What might they symbolise? What is the mood of the artwork?

8. Look at the painting on display from the series **Dona Nobis Pacem**. The artist says it is souls seeking peace. Is the black a space or a solid surface? Are you looking through the white shapes or are they coming forward to the surface? Are the shapes flickering? How has the artist achieved this effect? Make a list of all the colours you can see in the work. Souls are not visible- how do you imagine souls would look like?

9. The work **Red Jacobs Ladder** refers to a biblical story from the Old Testament. Jacob was a Hebrew patriarch (son of Isaac, and ancestor of the Jews), who in a vision saw a ladder reaching up to heaven.

Have a look at the painting can you see how it tells this story? Can you see Christian and or Jewish symbols in the work? What do you think is the significance of 'red' in the title?

10. Look at his early landscape **Willow eyebrows**. The artist was influenced by Japanese Haiku – which are like playful poems, word pictures often written by Zen Buddhist monks. Break up the two words in this title. Draw a WILLOW (a tree with long bending branches/ or in old English a cricket bat). Then Draw EYEBROWS

Can you combine the two drawings? Why do you think the artist combined these two in his title for this work?

11. Find the largest painting in the exhibition. Can you see many layers of paint? How do you think the artist applied the paint? (Was he delicately making each brush mark? Or can you see splatters of paint?) Find the smallest work in the exhibition and ask yourself the same question- How did the artist apply the paint? What materials has he used?

12. Look at the work **Prophecy Diptych**. The **Prophecy Series** comes from a passage in the Bible about God bringing a valley of dry bones back to life. Look at the colours the artist used what do they symbolise? Re-imagine the artwork with an opposite colour scheme. How is it different? What new emotions does it convey?

13. Rankin once explained that he got his colour palette from his Father's boot making workshop ie. Tan, red, black, & white powder based mixes used for men's shoes. Imagine instead he was: a Fireman; a Circus Performer; a Computer analyst or a Gardener. Choose two and consider what new colour palette would the artist be using?

14. The **Prophecy Series** refers to a passage in the Old Testament from Ezekiel. The passage tells of a valley of dry bones where God adds flesh and muscles and breathes life into the bones. What symbols can you see which tell this story in the work? (Look at colour, shape, line)

15. Choose from the works **Stone Progression**, **Willow eyebrows** or **Knowing or Not Knowing**. Imagine the artwork had a soundtrack. What music would be playing and why?

16. An artist's signature or style is particular to them. Consider the differing styles of your group. Ask students to write their signatures - see how varied each person's is. List the shapes and patterns you see repeated in David Rankin's work from the 1960s to 2004?

17. Look at the colours in **Witness Hillside** and **Witness Triptych**. Compare the mood of the two works?

18. Look at the landscape **Ridge – Mungo**. Where can you see movement in the work? How has the artist created this effect? What view point of the landscape do you think it is?

19. Think about the provenance of the work? Look at the text panel. Can you find who the owner of the art work is?

20. The artist introduced a white line at the top of his paintings in the Jerusalem series which he calls his 'line of survival' and it reappears in other works. Count how many times the white line appears in the exhibition?



David Rankin, *Two Figures—Huertas* 2000, Charcoal & Wash on Paper, 30x23cm. Collection the Artist.

21. Look at *Husband and Wife – Ying and Yang*. Do you know the symbol for Yin and Yang? It comes from Chinese Philosophy, Yin is the passive female principle of the universe and Yang is the active male principle. How does David Rankin represent his version of this idea? What does it tell you about his relationship with his wife?

22. Compare the works on paper of the Sonora Desert with the painting of the desert, *Grey Sonora Landscape*. What mood do the different colours convey?

23. Describe the shapes and colours in *Landscape and Clouds*? What time of day do you think it represents? Is there a storm brewing or not?

POST VISIT RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

A. Recall what was your favourite work in the exhibition and your least favourite. Write a review of this exhibition for a medium of your choice - radio, TV, internet or newspaper and refer to these two works.

B. Ian Fairweather and Paul Klee were both artists who influenced David Rankin. Research these artists. Can you find specific examples of their work which remind you of works by David Rankin?

C. David Rankin is influenced by Eastern philosophy and art. Research Historical Chinese and Japanese painting, try and create your own wood cut or painting in the style of the works. You might like to make your subject matter more contemporary. Research Chinese and Japanese contemporary artists who have exhibited in Australia at the Asia Pacific Triennial held in Brisbane. What new media are they working in?

D. David Rankin was influenced by Philosophy and Religions, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity. Can you find the creation myth according to at least two of these religions?

POST VISIT PRACTICAL IDEAS

a. Explore emotional impact using line, colour, and shape. Label the back of your paper with one of these words: Loneliness, Calm, Joy, or Anger. Then select two colours and express those particular emotions using lines, shapes and colour. Select a second word and create a second composition. Group your works together which have the same word written on the back. Compare them; are there similarities in colour, shape and line?

b. Rankin enjoys the traditional craft of painting. Experiment with different brushes and implements for painting; vary brushstrokes and density of a paint. Try using the same paint in as many different ways as possible. Then create a work using black ink, black paint, and charcoal- again vary the way you make your marks.

c. Can you think of a significant event or childhood memory? Think about this personal story and create your own set of symbols to tell the story. You could paint, draw or sculpt your story using found objects to represent each different symbol. (At no stage do you need to disclose your story unless you wish to) Give the work a title.

d. Rankin used black ink as an homage to oriental artists. Create a work using black ink- write your signature many times on a piece of slightly wet paper in black ink. Allow to dry then cut into strips and re-collage back together in a new composition. Consider the variety of results amongst the group. Finish by giving the work a name – perhaps including “haiku” in the title!

e. The *Elemental Union* works refer to the elements of earth, air, fire, and water as well as the poetry of **Wallace Stevens**. Try to create your own series of works inspired by one of these elements.

f. Photography - Abstraction vs. Figuration. Use a camera to find abstract pictures in nature. Try to take photos to capture just the abstract section or pattern so that it is difficult to tell what the original thing was.

g. David Rankin was particularly interested in Haiku. (see GLOSSARY) Here are two from BASHO a famous Zen Monk and Haiku Poet of the 17th Century translated from Japanese into English.

Summer moon
Clapping hands,
I herald dawn.

On sweet plumb blossoms
The sun rises suddenly.
Look a mountain path!

Could you write your own Haiku poem about your visit to the exhibition? (You may wish to include humour and consider the Season at the time of your visit)

ACTIVITIES YRS 10-12 & TERTIARY

1. As you enter the exhibition, what are your first impressions? Record just a few of your thoughts.

2. Rankin's body of work explores spirituality, history, philosophy and human experience and throws up many opposites giving the work its tension and balance. In spiritual & philosophical thought paired opposites are considered central to the universe. Try and match a painting to each of these groupings?

Light and Dark	Past and present
Joy and Despair	Text and Image
Surface and depth	Abstract and representational
Hidden and Exposed	Life and death
Above and Beneath	Male and Female

3. Unforseen events can often be responsible for new directions, which artists choose to take. Consider this in relation to Rankin's oeuvre. Dore Ashton sites two significant events the first in 1979 the second in 1997 (Refer to Background Information: Personal History). Look at his body of work can you see distinct changes at these times?

4. His use of colour is both personal and political- he derives his colour palette from his Father's boot making workshop - red, tan, black, white of men's shoes; an almost sentimental reference to his childhood and history. He says he uses black ink as a homage to the Oriental painters he admires. If you had to think of a colour scheme to represent you and your family what colours would you select?

5. Rankin says the spots in his paintings were inspired by Australian Landscape painters such as Fred Williams, the Expressionist Paul Klee's calligraphic use of spots and Chinese Chan painting. "If you look at Chinese and Japanese landscape painting there's an element which they call **Qi** – life spirit – in the painting, and this is the spotting." Find the number of paintings where you can see the "life spirit"?

6. Select one of Rankin's paintings. Think about the process of physically creating the work. What kind of marks can you see on the canvas? What tools did he use, look at the application of the paint? Could the marks have been made mechanically or not? How is this, an expression of the artist himself?

7. What is the narrative in **Golgotha Triptych – Traces**? Can you read each part of the Triptych? What might the red symbolise in the first two parts? Why is it absent in part three? What are *Traces*? How does this word add to the meaning in the work?

8. Look at the painting on display from the series **Dona Nobis Pacem**. Rankin says they "are an image of souls seeking peace." He is trying to make visible something invisible. Is the black a void or a solid surface? How has he used colour in the work? What do you imagine souls would look like?

9. **Dona Nobis Pacem** is Latin meaning 'Grant us peace.' Why do you think the artist chose a Latin title for this work? Where do you hear Latin today?

10. Rankin explains that for him the essence of landscape is that your eye drifts over it. Look at the composition of the work **Landscape and Clouds** where does your eye move on the canvas and why? Find two other landscapes in the exhibition. Describe the composition. What part of the landscape is represented? Is there a focal point in the works?

11. On abstraction the artist says "there is a distinction between painting a person who is passionate, or painting a person who is meditating, and painting what I hope to be an image that would induce *that state in the viewer.*" Find a painting which you think is quite meditative. Look at the title. What is the work about? What colours has the artist used? Describe the meditative qualities of the work?

12. There is some use of figuration in the Jerusalem series. What can you recognise in the work? Why might the artist have chosen to use some representation with the Jerusalem works?

13. Describe the texture of a work from the **Jerusalem Series**. How does the texture of the surface add to the meaning in the work?

14. Stones are considered to be the bones of a landscape. The pattern and repetition in **Stone Progression** suggest nature's patterns and rhythms. Painted in 1969 he returns to stones as subject matter again in 1999. Compare and contrast the work from the late 60s with his **Stone Series** from 1999.

15. Think about the provenance of the artists work? Look at the text panel. Can you find who is the owner of the artwork? Where would you most likely find a work by Rankin outside of this exhibition?

16. The **Prophecy Series** refers to a passage by Ezekiel in the Old Testament. It is one of the few biblical passages that reference painting. It also mentions a valley of dry bones where God breathes life into the bones. What elements has the artist used to suggest this narrative?

17. Imagine the figures in the work **Knowing or Not Knowing** were in conversation. What do you think they are saying?

18. What does the red symbolise in **Three Crossings**? How would the meaning of the painting change if you swapped the colour scheme for an opposite one?

19. David Rankin is a self taught painter who has explored subject matter from landscape, to philosophical, spiritual, and theological ideas, his own life experiences and travels. His abstract paintings show both Eastern and Western influences. In which works can you identify Eastern Influences?

20. The shapes in the work **Ridge – Mungo** have almost a childlike quality to them. What do you think the shapes express? This work is quite different to other darker canvases. What emotion does it convey?

21. Choose from the work **Many Rooms Wooster, Landscape and Clouds** or **Black Prophecy Study**. How has the artist used space in the work? What might the space or absence of space be a symbol of?

22. In pairs or as a group discuss how two of the following works might address spiritual concepts: **Knowing or Not Knowing, Husband and Wife – Ying and Yang, Golgotha Night Diptych**?

23. Consider the different emotions conveyed in **Green Sonora** and **Yellow Sonora** with **Black Menorah** or **Prophecy Study**? What does it tell you about the artist's state of mind when creating the different works?

24. Compare and contrast Rankin's works on paper with his paintings. Does the medium alter the meanings in the works?

25. Find the large black diptych painting with the white stripes. Before reading the title, what do you think it is? (Pages in a book? A rib cage?) Read the title and then ask the same question? '**Black Prophecy**' almost conjures an image of doomsday; the red becomes blood, the white like bars in a prison. Has the reading of the work changed on knowing the title?

26. Think about the use of symmetry and balance in the **Husband and Wife series**. How does it relate to the themes in the work?

27. The Menorah is a Jewish symbol of light and represents non-violence for Israel. Ironically this in opposition to its turbulent past and war torn present. What is the mood of the work **Black Menorah**? How does the title convey this idea of irony?

28. The art historian Lucy Lippard saw spiritual expression in the simplicity and seeming emptiness of black or white monochromes. "The white painting is a blank canvas where all is potential; the black painting has obviously been painted, but painted out, hidden, destroyed." (Tuchman p. 317) Consider this in relation to the works **Black Prophecy Diptych** and **Black Tfilin**. What meaning does the black convey in the works?

29. Compare **Willow eyebrows** to **Grey Sonora Landscape**. The works seem quite different, what similarities can you find?

30. Rankin's visual language is abstraction, as it best facilitates making ephemeral ideas such as spirit, soul or the essence of a landscape, concrete. What techniques does Rankin use to try and capture the spirit or essence of **Golgotha**?

31. Compare the work on paper **Prophecy Study** with the painting **Black Prophecy Diptych**. Look at the different use of space in the work? How does the work on paper connect to the final canvas?

32. Find the earliest dated work in the exhibition and then find the most recent. Can you see similarities in style or has the artists work changed with time?

POST VISIT RESEARCH & DISCUSSION

A. Write a critical review of this exhibition for - radio, TV, internet or newspaper. Consider your first impressions. Did your opinion change following the exhibition?

B. Rankin won the Wynne prize for landscape at the Art Gallery of NSW in 1983. The Archibald Prize takes art into the public domain being competitive it receives as much attention as a sporting event. Consider how important to Australia's cultural heritage are artists prizes and awards? How important are they to the individual artist? Do a vox pop survey asking people about art. Have they heard of the Archibald Prize? Could they name an Australian artist? Compare your results as a group.

C. Find a passage which appeals to you from one of the following diverse historical sources which have influenced David Rankin, the Bible, **Kaballah**, **Chang Tzu**, **Heraclitus**, **Giovanni Pico della Mirandola**, **Li Po** or **Tu Fu**. Create a painting in response to the passage.

D. Consider the religious themes in Rankin's work. Do a comparative study using, **Black Menorah**, **Buddha and Bones**, and **Golgotha Night Diptych**.

E. In terms of art history Rankin is outside of contemporary trends such as Conceptual art and could be positioned in relation to Tony Tuckson in Australia and American born Cy Twombly based in Europe and the US. Compare each of the artists work. (NB. Cy Twombly has recently been added to the collection of the AGNSW)

F. Rankin cites the art of Paul Klee and Ian Fairweather as sources of inspiration. Research these artists works and Klee's writings and find the connections to Rankin's work?

POST VISIT PRACTICAL IDEAS

a. Rankin has created small works on paper as well as large canvases. Experiment with developing a small intimate painting and then try and work on a huge canvas or roll of paper. How is the process different? Which experience did you prefer developing the small work or the larger one and why?

b. In terms of medium, he says he often uses black ink rather than black acrylic paint as a direct homage to oriental painting. As an experiment use black ink with other coloured acrylic paints in developing a painting.

c. Rankin's palette links to the colours found in his father's boot making workshop. What colours might be symbolic of your own family? Think about a recent significant event or memory from childhood and develop an abstract painting telling this story, using just these colours.

d. Husband and Wife- Ying and Yang is a composition of balance and tension. Sculpt, paint, or collage your own work exploring two opposite ideas for eg. Day and night; heat and ice; hope and despair...etc.

e. The **Elemental Union** works refer to the elements of earth air fire and water as well as the poetry of Wallace Stevens. Can you find a poem by Stevens? Try to create your own series of works inspired by the elements.

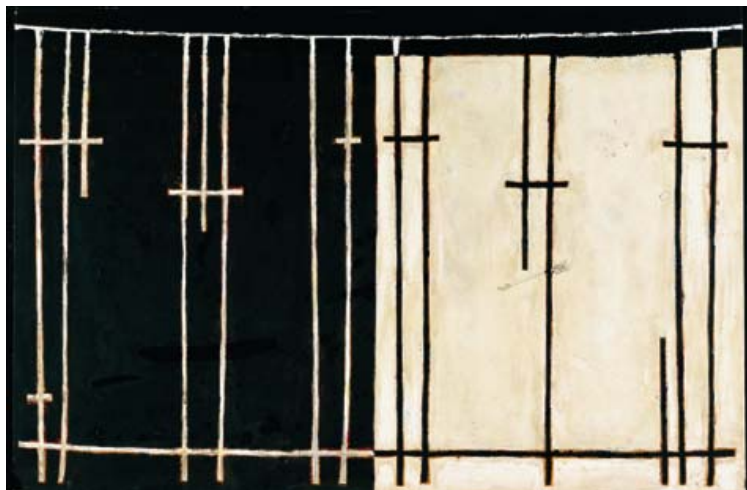
f. Rankin illustrated his wife Lily Brett's book of poems about the holocaust. He says he wanted his holocaust images to be a public declaration. His work **The Drowned and The Saved** is 18ft long- too big to be part of this exhibition. Find other artists who have created large scale artworks. For example Christo, Sol Le Wit, Jackson Pollock, Juan Davila, Barbara Kruger. Research and compare their intentions in creating such large scale work. Develop your own installation based on a political, spiritual or social justice theme. Imagine there were no limitations to scale or materials. Create a diagram of your installation with notations about materials you would need and people you would need to employ to create the work. Or build a model of the work. Give the work a title.

g. Rankin's landscapes often show a view from above. Using landscape as your theme develop a series of works which show: a detail of the landscape; a birds eye view; use a view finder to paint just a section of the landscape; and a view framed by a significant part of the landscape- a tree branch, a hill side, a cliff edge...etc. Consider which is the most abstract of your landscapes. Give the works a title.

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Image: David Rankin, *Husband & Wife—Ying & Yang*, 1994, acrylic on canvas, 152.5x230cm Collection Adrian Slinger Galleries