

# Ian Friend: Thirty Years of Works on Paper 1977-2007

24 April to 29 June 2008

Curated by Anne Kirker and Gordon Craig

Presented by QUT Art Museum

## Teachers' Notes

### Introduction

This is a timely survey exhibition showcasing Queensland artist Ian Friend's meditative, abstract work. Friend often draws inspiration from literature and poetry, notably the work of British poet J.H. Prynne, as he muses over the essence of human existence and personal and universal histories. Coinciding with the exhibition is the official launch of the new monograph *Ian Friend: On Paper*, which is supported by the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland.

These support notes for teachers will help make group visits to this exhibition productive and memorable for students. Included is curriculum-specific information on the exhibition that draws on the core learning outcomes for the Year 1-10 syllabus and the year 11-12 exit criteria. Biographical information on the artist and key themes are also provided to supply teachers with a number of issues and discussion points that could assist them with formulating a subject or unit for class.



Ian Friend, *Joy at death itself: breath (for Santiago Bose)*, 2002-07. Indian ink, gouache and crayon. Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane.

### Areas of Interest:

- Abstraction and non-representation
- Emotive response
- Sources of inspiration – poetry and architecture
- Queensland artist, Ian Friend
- Australian art
- Printmaking practice
- Visual analysis – line, shape and form

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# Curriculum Relevance

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This exhibition is a good introduction to the media of printmaking as students are presented with some practical and conceptual processes that go into this often technically demanding and time-consuming art form. Along with displaying some laborious techniques, the work of Ian Friend reveals the artist's personal engagement with various sources of inspiration, such as jazz, poetry and architecture, demonstrating that artists respond to a wide range of stimuli in novel and innovative ways to develop new aesthetic values and qualities.

## Years P-4

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### The Arts: Visual Arts

**VA 3.1** Students design, make and modify images and objects applying elements and additional concepts to construct intended meanings.

**VA 3.2** Students make and display images and objects, understanding the functions of informal and formal display.

**VA 3.3** Students compare elements and additional concepts of images and objects from a variety of cultural and historical contexts.

Year P-4 students have an opportunity to encounter, perhaps for the first time, art and an art museum, and learn about the value of exhibiting and looking at works of art. With this exhibition, students are introduced to 'works on paper' and the idea that various practices and mediums, such as watercolour, printmaking and drawing, utilise paper as their support.

## Years 5-10

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### The Arts: Visual arts

**VA 4.2** Students make and display images and objects considering purposes and audiences.

**VA 4.3** Students analyse elements and additional concepts evident in images and objects from a variety of cultural and historical contexts.

**VA 5.1a** Students make images and objects to express personal responses to researched ideas.

**VA 5.3** Students research and evaluate images and objects of Australian artists / designers / craftspeople from a variety of historical and contemporary contexts.

Year 5-10 students are encouraged to reflect their understanding of local area and community artists, identifying and interpreting images and objects in a community context.

## English

**Essential Learnings:** Literary and non-literary texts – students explore non-literary texts to develop an awareness of purpose, audience, subject matter and text structure within the visual arts.

## History

**TCC 6.1** Students apply their knowledge and understanding of the past to reveal the assumptions and beliefs underlying a contemporary policy such as immigration.

## Geography

**Core TCC 5.2** Students represent situations before and after a period of rapid change.

**Geography GCI 5.1** Students evaluate how material and non-material aspects of one culture may have been derived from other cultural groups.

**Geography TCC 6.1** Students explore a range of information technologies to enhance their understanding of an issue related to a change or continuity.

## Studies of Society and Environment

**TCC 2.1** Students explain different meanings about an event, artefact, story or symbol from different times.

**TCC1.3** Students share points of view about their own and others' stories.

**TCC 2.3** Students cooperatively evaluate how people have contributed to changes in the local environment.

Year 5-10 students are encouraged to conduct some background research into the artist, Ian Friend. Born and educated in England, the artist and their ties to a country that is closely affiliated with Australia make the issue of migration and Australian history worth deliberating in relation to this exhibition.

## Years 11-12

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### Visual arts

**Exit Criterion 3: Appraising** – Students analyse, interpret, evaluate and synthesise information about visual language, expression and meanings in artworks, relevant to concepts, focuses, contexts and media. Students also practice visual art terminology, referencing, and language conventions.

Senior students have the opportunity to individually research and evaluate artworks, and formulate responses with an understanding of the context in which they were made and displayed; consider the visual impact of images and objects in relation to context and space; discuss characteristics such as location, time, context and the temporal nature of displaying artworks.

## History

**Exit Criterion 2: Forming historical knowledge through critical inquiry** - Students analyse what is explicit and implicit in sources, including themes, values and interrelationships within and among sources.

## English

**Criterion 1: Knowledge and control of texts in their contexts** - Students interpret texts and construct their own texts, taking account of the way that meanings in texts are shaped by purpose, cultural context and social situation.

**Criterion 2: Knowledge** - Students gain knowledge and exercise their understanding of creative and poetic forms of writing and are able to view writing both in terms of the enjoyment texts give to people and the power texts have to influence, tell the stories of a culture and promote shared understandings.

**Criterion 3: Knowledge and application of the construction of texts** - Students to recognise that discourses available in the culture affect the representations in, and readings of, texts. Students identify how readers, listeners and viewers are positioned by the choices that writers, speakers and shapers make about what to include in and exclude from the text.

Senior students are encouraged to consider the relationship between art and literature (novels, short stories and poetry), both traditional and contemporary, particularly the ways these creative practices fed into the other. Students are also able to expand their consideration to the intertextual relationships with films, television programs, media, video games, advertisements, poems, other stories.

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## About the Artist

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### Ian Friend

Ian Friend was born in England in 1951. He has lived in Australia since 1985. Before emigrating, he taught at Chelsea School of Art and for several years was assistant curator in the Print Room at the Tate Gallery. In Australia, he taught again, firstly in Melbourne at the Victorian College of the Arts, then during most of the 1990s at the Tasmanian School of Art at Launceston. Afterwards, he moved with his partner Robyn Daw and their young son Dexter to Brisbane (where he has been based for ten years). There he was employed at the Queensland College of Art. For the past few years, Friend has devoted himself full-time to his art practice, establishing a studio in Brisbane. The artist has held solo exhibitions since 1978, among them, *Ian Friend: The Oval Window*, based on a sequence of poems by J.H. Prynne, which was held at the Brisbane City Gallery in mid 2002, and more recently, *Terragni*, at the QUT Art Museum (2004).

Throughout his career, Ian Friend has steadfastly perfected a signature approach to art, so much so that his drawings (paintings on paper) are unmistakably his own. Through black ink and white gouache, occasionally yellow ochre and Bellini-blue pigments, graphite lines traverse metaphysical terrains which are nevertheless, firmly located in lived experience. He is an artist of a high poetic order, dedicated to his craft and with a firm following in this country and elsewhere.

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## Key Themes:

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### Sources of Inspiration

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#### Poetry

Ian Friend was introduced to the poetry of J.H. Prynne by a friend, Richard Humphreys. He was amazed at the power he saw in the words and the delicate layers of meaning within Prynne's poems, and he quickly began drawing in response to them. One poem in particular, *The Oval Window* (excerpt below), inspired Friend to make an artwork named *The Snowdrift Line #2* (2002). Prynne's poem, like Friend's artwork, refers to an area within the physiology of the inner ear, where the "oval window" allows the brain to convert sound waves into neural impulses: interpreting sounds to create the sense of hearing. Tiny crystals deep inside the inner ear make up the so-called "snowdrift line", which are responsible for

coordinating balance and understanding the position of the brain with relation to gravity. Friend is interested in how sounds are not tangible things, but rather the brain's interpretation of sound waves; there is an inner "sound" inside the human brain, and the outer sound waves travelling through the air. In *The Snowdrift Line*, he responds to *The Oval Window* poem through drawing what is intangible and abstract to be individually interpreted, much like how the oval window translates abstract sound waves into what we believe is hearing.

The dots that appear in *The Snowdrift Line #2*, refer to the tiny crystals inside the oval window, and they appear in later artworks such as his *The Joy at Death Itself* series (2002-2007) where they gradually shrink in size. It relates to a line in *The Oval Window* poem that inspires Friend to think about the passing of his parents and of cellular transformation. He sees the transformation of cells inside living beings as symbolic of shifts and renewal, helping him to celebrate the processes of life when he thinks of his parents, rather than the sadness he experienced at their passing.

Excerpt from *The Oval Window*, JH Prynne:

*Her wrists shine white like the frosted snow:  
They call each other to the south stream.  
The oval window is closed in life,  
By the foot-piece of the stapes. Chill shadows  
Fall from the topmost eaves, clear waters  
Run beside the blossoming peach.*

### » Activity Starters

- Are there any poems or books that inspire your thoughts?
- Can you think of ways you could express those thoughts and ideas through art?
- What are other cultural productions that can inspire you:
  - Television?
  - Video games?
  - Advertisements?
  - \_\_\_\_\_?
- Ian Friend was also influenced by architecture and engineering, like a steep road he found in Tasmania (an example of which can be seen in *Third Generation* (1989)). Can you think of strange or mundane things that might inspire you?

## Printmaking

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### Printmaking Processes

The development of printmaking to produce works of visual art can be seen as connected to the development of movable type and the printing press in the 15th century (although woodblock printing had been used on textiles since ancient times).

There are many different types of printmaking techniques however they all employ one of the four types of printmaking processes. These processes are defined as follows:

- o Intaglio
- o Relief
- o Planographic
- o Screenprinting

### Intaglio

Intaglio printing processes involve the use of a **metal plate**. Although the individual techniques differ slightly they all involve lines or marks being cut into a metal plate and these lines/marks are the areas that hold the ink and print onto the paper. **Engraving, etching, drypoint, aquatint** and **mezzotint** are all intaglio techniques. Some artists who have used these techniques in the past are Rembrandt (etching, 17th century) and Hogarth (engraving, 18th century).

### Relief Printing

Techniques which use **raised printing surfaces** are known as **relief prints**. Woodcuts, linocuts and wood engraving are all examples of relief printmaking techniques. Relief prints are created in **reverse**, meaning that areas to remain unpainted are carved out of the **wooden block** or **linoleum** (lino). For example, if you wanted to print your name, you would need to carve it out backwards, like a mirror reflection. When the artist has finished carving the design, the block is covered with ink or paint. The final print is produced by pressing the block firmly against paper using a roller or some kind of press.

Originally to create prints with many colours, several boards were required (one for each colour). However, Picasso used the linocut technique and developed his very own style. He produced multi-colour prints by cutting away more and more from one plate. At the end, the process could not be reproduced because the original plate was gone<sup>1</sup>.

### Planography

In planographic printing, as opposed to relief and intaglio processes, there is no difference in level between the inked surface and the non-inked surface<sup>2</sup>. **Lithography** is a planographic printing technique which is based on the principle that water and grease resist each other. Lithography could be considered one of the most direct printmaking techniques as the image is drawn straight onto a flat surface in much the same manner as a drawing, with a wax crayon.

### Steps in making a Lithograph:

- o The artist **draws** an image on a polished slab of limestone with a **greasy ink** called **tusche** or with an oil-based lithographic **crayon**.
- o The stone is thoroughly dampened. The water remains on the ungreased areas only.
- o Printing ink is applied with a **roller**. It adheres only to the greased parts (the drawing on the stone).
- o Lightly dampened paper is then placed over the surface of the image, followed by a protective sheet. Together the stone and paper are passed through a **flat-bed scraper press**.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.artelino.com/articles/printmaking.asp>

<sup>2</sup> A. Beguin, 'Glossary of Technical Terms' in Prints: History of an Art, pp. 243-257.

## Screenprinting

The screenprinting technique is based on applying **stencils** to a **screen** which is stretched across a frame. The screen is generally made out of **silk** or another material of fine weave. Areas of the stencil which have been cut out allow the ink to pass through and print the image on the paper or material underneath.

Artists who have used this technique are Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg. You may know the screenprinting technique best from its wide usage on textiles such as mass-produced t-shirts.

## Printmaking and Ian Friend

Ian Friend's *Untitled II* (1985) woodcut is made from a cross-section of off-cut wood from a tree once used in one of his sculptures. The rings of the tree show its age and create a unique textural effect, especially with the visible scars caused by the saw cutting the wood. The simple shapes carved into the wood by the artist could normally be considered "abstract", but he never thinks of these works as abstract because they are physical objects and are **real**.

There are many layers and textures to Friend's prints like the texture of the wood showing its age and roughness. The roughness of textures such as these is emphasised by the fact they are printed on delicate Japanese paper, heightening the contrast and the rough textural effect.

### » Activity Starters

- *Look around your everyday environment. Can you find any examples of screenprinting? Look in your wardrobe. Have any of your clothes had any designs screenprinted onto them?*
- *What unusual household objects could you use to make a print that might have different textures? What textures might a potato or a bar of soap make?*
- *Look around the Ian Friend exhibition closely. Can you identify the prints?*
- *Sometimes the information panels next to an artwork tell you how it was made. What printmaking methods can you find?*

## Abstraction and Emotions

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Ian Friend's work is primarily abstract, responding to poetry or personal experiences and thoughts. His practice focuses heavily on pigments and composition, and is loaded with many layers of colours and materials. To gain a better understanding of artworks with such an emphasis on colour and layers, conservators can examine cross-sections of paint under a microscope to determine the composition of an artwork or the materials used. The significance of layers in Friend's work stems from his interest in very specific colours and the products with which they have been mixed. His artworks are intricately complex, with veils of colour maintaining the work's integrity at any magnification. The exhibition contains several photographs of such cross-section magnifications, displaying the true complexity of the artworks.

The complexity of these works arises also through their production; Friend's works on paper begin with a concept only, never a set plan leading to a specific outcome. As his emotions and thoughts evolve over time, the artwork changes and takes on a life of its own.

Printmaking usually starts with a more specific plan, but the printmaking processes have a strong influence on the final product and Friend looks forward to the unpredictability of printing as it sometimes creates something new.

### » Activity Starters

- *Can you think of times when your artworks have changed as you've made them? Why do you think that happened?*
- *Have you ever made a "good mistake" making an artwork?*
- *Why do you think it is important for a gallery or museum to show some different aspects of an artwork, like the magnified photographs in the Ian Friend exhibition?*
- *Can you think of another famous artist whose works might not look like anything, but are made of many layers of paint?*
- *Pay close attention to the way paint, ink, or any other medium works next time you make an artwork. What is special about it? Will it change the way you express a certain idea?*

## Australian Context

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Ian Friend was born in England in 1951 and studied art, design, and art history before working at London's Tate Gallery as an Assistant Curator of Prints, and as a practicing artist. He moved to Melbourne, Australia in 1985 and continued his practice here, although initially the move was spurred by a lecturing position at the Victorian College of Art. He was particularly influenced by his trips to nearby Tasmania and eventually secured an artist's residency at the Tasmanian State Institute of Technology where he produced the *TSIT* series (1988), which was named for the school. The *TSIT* series was a response to Aboriginal sculptural poles and New Guinean hunting spears that he felt shared a stylistic similarity to his own practice. His exposure to these artworks, as well as to other Indigenous Australian designs, led him to experiment with styles and attempt to find an **antipodean** connection to his work.

Friend and his family moved to Queensland in 1997 where he has since established a studio and exhibited his work several times.

### » Activity Starters

- *Ian Friend believes his work shares stylistic similarities with some Indigenous Australian motifs. Why has he pursued this in further works?*
- *Can you identify any Indigenous Australian styles in Friend's artworks? Is there a relationship between works with such a style and the year they were produced?*