

Art Appreciation

Activity: Margaret Olley



Ben Quilty is known for the dark and sinister subject matter in his paintings. Images such as skulls, snakes and grotesque Siamese-twin compositions are seen regularly in his work. In 2011 Quilty won the Archibald prize after painting his mentor Margaret Olley. When asked why he painted her he said “Margaret’s had such a powerful bearing on my career (and) she has asked me constantly for years to stop painting ugly skulls and paint something beautiful.”

Studying this painting with the students in your classroom would be quite worthwhile as they most likely have a role model or person who has a large impact on their lives.

Lesson Resources:

- Students bring in a photograph of a special person in their lives
- Pictures of some of Ben Quilty’s artwork

1. Looking at the artwork:

Questions to ask the students:

- What are you thinking about when looking at the painting? How do you feel?
- Who do you think is in the painting?
- Why do you think he painted her?
- What is special about her for this artist?

2. Learning about the artist:

- Who is Ben Quilty?
- As an artist what does he do?
- What does he paint?
- Has this artist been influenced by the world? Eg. Issues happening in the world
- Do you think Ben Quilty has used previous art works of his own or of other artists as inspiration for his work?



3. Symbols:

Show the students some of Quilty’s other paintings.

- Why do you think he has painted these pictures?
- What might they symbolise?

- Ask the students who the significant person is in their lives and what makes that person so special.
- Have the students write down an “*Appreciation Statement*” about that person and why they are so special to them.
- This statement can be used in later classes as inspiration for reflection
- The photograph will be used in a subsequent lesson for an art practice activity

This appreciation statement can be used in later classes as inspiration for reflection. The photograph will be used in a subsequent lesson for an art practice activity where the students will be using the art techniques that Ben Quilty use.