

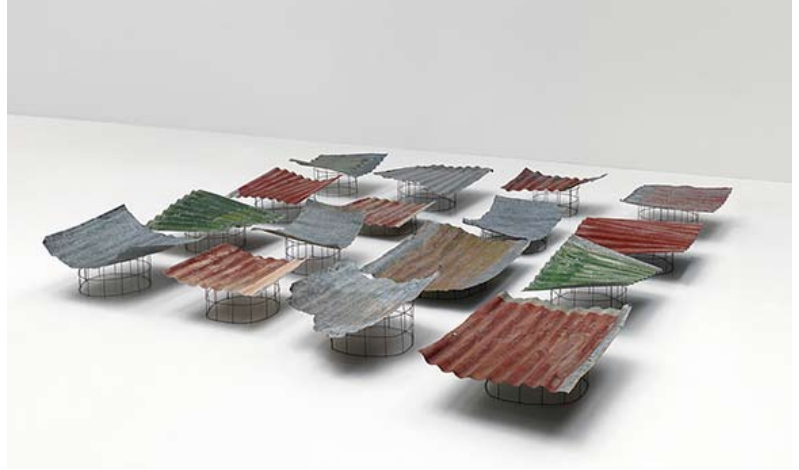
A FORMAL FOCUS – ART ELEMENTS AND PRINCIPLES

Art elements including line, shape, form, texture and colour, and principles such as rhythm, repetition, variety, contrast and scale are integral to the moods, feelings and sensations conveyed by Rosalie Gascoigne's assemblages and installations.

The subtle variations found in elements such as colour and texture in Gascoigne's artworks are often the result of chance and the forces of nature at work on a particular material. However, in the selection and arrangement of different elements in the composition of the works there is a strong sense of underlying structure and order.

The structure and order that underpins Gascoigne's artworks often derive from a grid format. The regular geometric structure and formal order of the grid was used in a rigid way by some modern artists, especially those associated with Minimalism, as a way of ridding

art of illusion and emotion. Gascoigne, however, uses the grid in a highly individual way in her assemblages and installations, allowing the visual elements in her work to maintain great expressive power. Something of the different moods, feelings and sensations that Gascoigne evoked using a grid format are evident in a comparison between *All that jazz* and *Earth 1999, no. 1*, 1999.



Inland sea (1986), weathered painted corrugated iron, wire. 39.1 x 325.0 x 355.5 cm (variable) (installation). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased, 1983 (S4.a-ff-1993)

In *Inland sea*, 1986, sixteen large sheets of corrugated tin hover above the floor in a loose grid arrangement. The grid format unifies the separate parts of the composition, and also enhances the expressive power of different visual elements through repetition. The shapes and lines repeated across the buckling sheets of tin create a powerful sense of the gentle movement of wind or water.

The strong visual rhythms and movement evident in Gascoigne's compositions are often achieved through the repetition of different visual elements. *Step through*, 1980, is made from fifteen separate parts, each made from a torn piece of brightly coloured, floral patterned linoleum mounted on a block of wood. The blocks sit at different angles creating different levels within the installation. The spaces between the different parts create a meandering path for the viewer to explore, highlighting the importance of movement through and across space in Gascoigne's work.

I was thinking about the unkempt empty blocks in built up city areas ... usually covered in rank grasses and flowering weeds ... rubble, old tins and bottles. One steps through them gingerly and, with possible snakes in mind, lifts one's knees high.

Vici MacDonald, *Rosalie Gascoigne*, Regaro Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1998, p. 48

In *Steel magnolias*, 1994, repeated elongated strips of corrugated iron, and the slivers of contrasting darker toned wood glimpsed between them, create a strong sense of upward vertical movement. The shorter horizontal lines (created by the joins in each vertical 'column') in the composition add a competing visual rhythm across the surface of the work, 'calming' the upward thrust of the strong verticals. The tiny nail holes at the joins add visual variety to the composition and dance across the surface, subtly reinforcing the marching movement of the horizontal lines. Within the monochromatic colour scheme of *Steel magnolias* a subtle pattern of soft greys and creamy whites creates a play of light and shadow that contributes to the feeling of movement, space and air that flows through the work.

Colour assumed a vital presence in Gascoigne's work. In an overview of her work, as in the exhibition *Rosalie Gascoigne* (2008), the importance of particular colours is revealed in swathes and groupings of yellow, red, orange and white artworks, culminating in the grey, brown and ochre hues of the *Earth* series (1999), which were the artist's last works. Individually, each work reveals something of the beauty of colour and its ability to suggest meaning; from sun-baked, muted yellows that remind us of vistas of dry grass, to soft pale greys and whites that murmur quietly of the open air and cloud.

Gascoigne was often drawn to particular materials because of the beauty of their colour and texture, and the associations or moods these suggested. The visual qualities and associations found in the textures of humble and/or discarded materials are clearly revealed in Gascoigne's work – from the flaky layers of faded paint on weathered tin or wood that speak of both rural life and work, and the forces and seasons of nature, to the staccato flash of retro-reflective road signs that remind us of driving through the landscape.

Questions and Activities

Create a table like the one below. In the first column, make a list of the art elements that you believe are most important in Gascoigne's artworks. In the second column, list descriptive words or phrases that relate to these elements.

Line	Undulating, flowing, shuddering, jostling, jumping, dancing, staggering
Texture	Shimmering, flashing, glinting
Colour	Faded, serene whites, pale blond, silvery grey, mottled
Form	Swelling, undulating

Choose an artwork by Gascoigne that you admire.

- What are the important art elements and principles used in this work?
- Describe how they are used and what they contribute to the feelings, mood or sensations conveyed by the work.

Compare and contrast an artwork by Gascoigne that utilises a grid format with an artwork by another artist who has also used a grid in the composition of their work (e.g. Donald Judd, Agnes Martin, Hilarie Mais).

- Describe how the grid is used in each work.
- What visual effect, feeling or ideas are associated with the grid?
- What are the key similarities and differences between the two works?
- Based on research into each artist's interests, what reasons can you suggest for these similarities and differences?

(left to right)
Earth 1999, no. 1 1999
 painted plywood
 118.0 x 107.0 cm
 National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
 Gift of Ben Gascoigne AO and family,
 2008 (2008.7.1)
 Photo: Courtesy National Gallery
 of Australia, Canberra

Step through 1980
 linoleum on wood
 (A-O) 370.0 x 93.0 x 28.0 cm (overall)
 National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
 Gift of the Philip Morris Arts Grant, 1982
 (83.1606.A-O)
 Photo: Courtesy National Gallery of
 Australia, Canberra

