

## GREAT ART IDEAS FOR TEACHERS

# SUBURBAN COLLAGES: INSPIRED BY HOWARD ARKLEY'S ACTUAL FRACTUAL

YEAR 5–8

### OVERVIEW

In this activity students will develop their understanding of visual conventions and artistic practices in Australian contemporary art by examining *Actual fractual*, 1994, by artist Howard Arkley. They will consider how Arkley represents his chosen subject matter, and how his artwork reflects his perspectives on the suburban environment. They will develop and apply stencilling and collage making skills to plan and create their own artwork and engage in critical thinking to evaluate their own work.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

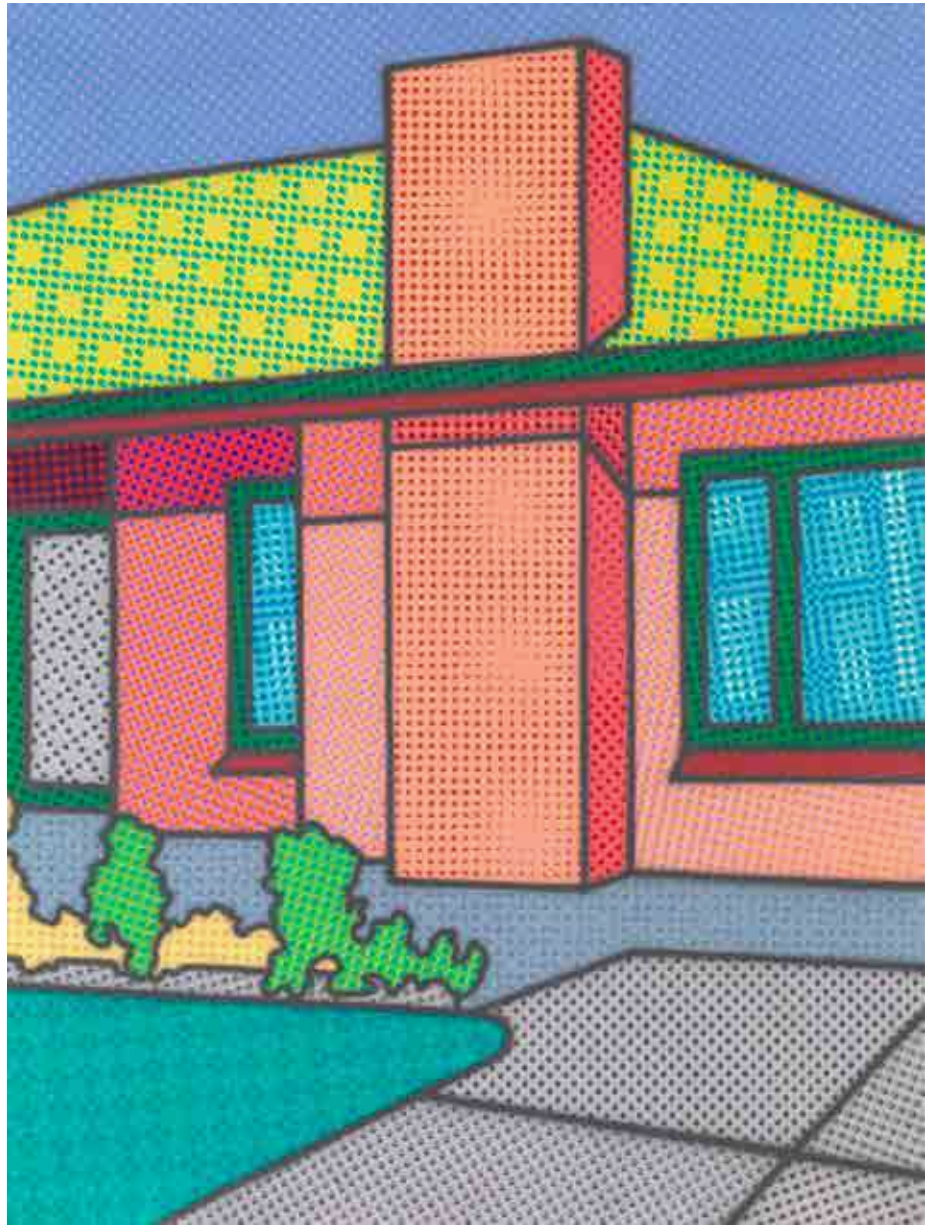
- Examine how Howard Arkley utilises colour, shape and pattern to create a vibrant airbrushed painting of suburban life with a balanced composition.
- Create an artwork which takes inspiration from Howard Arkley's visual arts practice and expresses ideas about suburban life.
- Plan and apply collage making techniques and processes to create a work which depicts the exterior of a typical suburban home.
- Evaluate their own creative process and decision making, and reflect with a partner on how effectively their ideas or feelings have been expressed in their own artwork.

### STUDENT EXAMPLES



Created by students at an NGV workshop

## RELATED ARTWORK



**Howard Arkley**

*Actual fractual* 1994

from the *Pointillist suburb* series 1994

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

202.7 x 152.2 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with the assistance of the Fox Family Foundation,  
Robert Gould, Carol Sisson, Peter and Anne Greenham, the Peggy  
and Leslie Cranbourne Foundation, Richard and Rosemary Raw  
and donors to the Arkley Appeal, 2015

© Courtesy of the artist's estate and Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art

## DISCUSS

Howard Arkley is widely recognised as the foremost painter of Australian suburbia. His work blurs the distinctions between high art and pop culture by referencing both art history (for example the Pop Art movement) and the everyday. His signature houses, domestic interiors and fascination with mass culture struck a chord with Australians, who readily identified with his images. He looked for the spectacle in the everyday, unlocking its potential as a vehicle for abstract compositions which explore colour, pattern, shape and line. The humble home was repeatedly reinvented as a vivid psychedelic Pop Art image to capture and hold the gaze of the viewer. Arkley's trademark technique of airbrushing can be seen in *Actual fractual*, 1994, in which he filled in larger areas first before adding smaller details and patterns to the surface using stencils.

Use the following discussion points with an image of Howard Arkley's *Actual fractual*, 1994:

- Compare the work to a photograph of a typical suburban home built in a similar era (the 1980s–90s). How are the two homes similar? How are they different?
- Describe the colours, shapes and patterns in the work. Why do you think the artist chose these colours, shapes and patterns?
- Using too much colour and pattern risks making the work look too busy. How has Howard Arkley maintained balance?  
*Consider the use of a limited range of patterns and colours, and the way they are placed. The darker tones indicate shadow falling on the surface of the house, suggesting depth.*
- What techniques and materials did Arkley use to create this work? Why do you think he chose those techniques and materials?
- How do Arkley's use of materials and techniques affect the way viewers see and understand the work?  
*Consider the artist's use of an airbrush and stencilling technique and how this relates to Pop imagery.*
- Why do you think Howard Arkley chose to paint the house like this? What does this tell us about his perspective on suburban life?

## RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- Facade templates – make these by tracing outlines of real estate photographs
- Colour pencils
- Graphite pencils
- A variety of coloured, textured and patterned papers
- Erasers
- Rulers
- Scissors
- Glue
- Thick black markers

## CREATE

Students design and create a patterned house inspired by Howard Arkley using the following steps:

1. Make two copies of your facade template.  
*One will act as a stencil for the collage, while the other will be a master copy for reference as you make your collage.*
2. Identify all the key components of the house.  
*For example, roof, gutters, chimney, walls, window frames and window glass.*
3. Consider which components you intend to recreate with flat coloured paper and those which will be filled with patterned paper.  
*Aim for a balance of flat colour and patterned throughout your facade. Consider how many different colours and patterns you will use and how you will place them throughout your work.*
4. Plan your design by lightly shading the components of the house onto your master template using coloured pencils.  
*Consider how your choice of colours can communicate feeling – what do you want people to think or feel when they look at your finished artwork?  
Don't worry about being too neat for this part, as this is just a plan.*
5. Collect a range of coloured and patterned paper for your collage and choose a piece for the background of the collage.
6. Select a piece of paper for the largest component of your house.  
*Don't get too fiddly yet. Remember that Howard Arkley always started with bigger, broader areas before adding smaller, finer details.*
7. Place the component from your stencil template onto the paper, and trace around it.
8. Carefully cut around the shape and place it onto your background paper.  
*Don't glue it down just yet.*
9. Repeat this process (steps 6–8) for all the components of the house, moving from the largest to smallest sections.
10. When all the pieces have been cut and placed, glue them down onto the background paper.  
*Refer to the master copy of your facade template to make sure you have placed all the components of the house in the right place.*
11. Let your collage dry.
12. Use a thick black marker and a ruler to mark the outlines which separate all the components of the house.

# PRESENT & REFLECT

Ask students to share their work with a partner:

- What did you consider when you chose your paper samples?
- Do you think you created a balanced composition? If so, how does your selection of paper create a balanced composition? If not, how could you change your work to improve the balance between colours and patterns?
- What do you hope people will think or feel when they look at your finished artwork?
- Is this a house you would like to live in? Why or why not?

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