Arthur Boyd's Studio, photo Bundanon Trust

ARTHUR BOYD'S STUDIO AND PRACTICE

Exploring the arts practice of Arthur Boyd through his studio

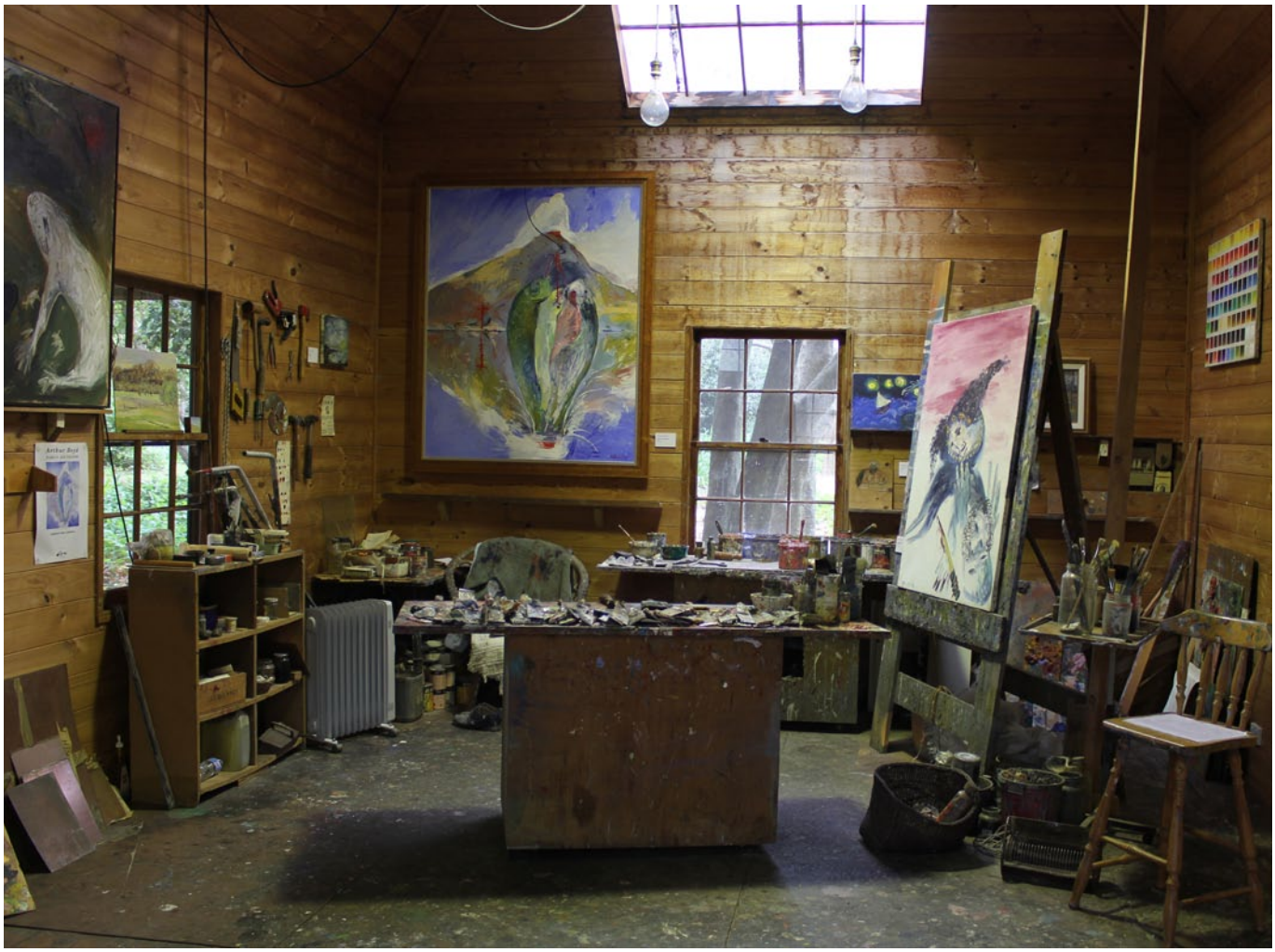
EDUCATION GUIDE

BUNDANON TRUST

View from North, and view from South of Arthur Boyd's Studio, photo Bundanon Trust

The Studio

Arthur built the modest weatherboard studio and it was finished in 1981. Arthur Boyd's studio is clad with stained weatherboards, has a galvanised iron hipped roof, skillion verandahs back and front, and it replicates the nineteenth century vernacular. The roofline of the studio matches that of the 1870's kitchen in keeping with the style of the property. The ceiling is cove shaped. Windows are a combination of fixed frames and traditional 6x6 overhung sash types. Since the studio was built, trees planted have created shade for the building.



A skylight on the south, fitting the cove ceiling, allows indirect natural light into the studio, throughout the seasons. Windows are found on all four walls, permitting views of the surrounding landscape and garden.

Lighting the studio

There are two bright tungsten lights suspended from the ceiling. Arthur suffered with insomnia and would often paint late into the night. The different coloured light bulbs, such as the blue bulbs in the centre of the studio, were an attempt to replicate daylight during the night. There are other older styles of incandescent bulbs near the skylight.

Skylight and tungsten light; blue bulbs simulate daylight, photo Bundanon Trust

The picture window

Arthur was commissioned to produce a large scale work for Parliament House based on the Shoalhaven landscape. This design was made into a tapestry, by The Australian Tapestry Workshop. The canvas was stretched in the studio and supported by the framework you see along the back wall. When the photographer arrived to take photos of the work, Arthur was still adding the finishing touches. The photographer responded that he couldn't take the photo, as the work was too big and he couldn't get far enough away to fit the entire painting in the shot. Arthur hadn't thought about how to get the work out of the studio. Arthur asked the then property manager to come with his chain-saw and cut a hole in the wall. It was later fitted with a window and was used as an access point for large scale paintings.

The long, narrow picture window and *Nodding green hood,* 1997 photo Bundanon Trust

The last painting painted in the studio

Nodding green hood was the last work finished in the studio. This painting is signed and dated 1999 even though it was produced in 1997.

It was produced in response to a request from a local festival to donate a work for auction. The nodding greenhood is an orchid which grows on the property. This work was retained and another donated to the festival in order to display the last work completed by Arthur in the studio. Arthur Boyd died in April 1999 in Melbourne.

This expressive work is characterised by thick impasto paint, with Arthur's blue-violet hues. Dramatic brushstrokes and lines made directly from the paint tube are evident. The signature is drawn straight from the tube of contrasting vermillion paint.

Copper paintings

In the studio, there is an example of a copper plate. Arthur painted very detailed artworks in oil onto these plates, using brushes he created from his daughter's hair to produce the very fine line work.

Biographer Darleen Bungey describes Arthur's approach to this technique:

"When it came to choosing the medium of copper for painting, Arthur was consciously setting himself a difficult task. While the *'big picture'* allowed him to *'let off steam…hoping it would work'* copper demanded that he deliberately *'set about to make it work'*. It was a time-consuming occupation, detailed and precise. To facilitate the close work Arthur bought an enormous magnifying glass, new spectacles and used an arm rest while painting."

One copper painting would take Arthur over a week to complete.

Copper plates used for delicate oil painting, a thigh bone from a heifer, photo Bundanon Trust

Productive years

In the 1980's Arthur was at his most successful and productive. Galleries would send blank canvases and boxes of paint to him to return quickly for sale – the demand was high for his work. He said at this time he didn't feel like an artist anymore, he was a maker of paintings. Arthur was very aware his works were increasingly becoming commodities and shied away from the commercial aspects of his field. Works from the Shoalhaven series on the east wall are an example of this type of work. Shoalhaven Riverbank I (at right) & II, 1993, paintings were made into limited edition prints.

Biographer Darleen Bungey reports that Arthur confessed to journalist Lynne Bell in 1985:

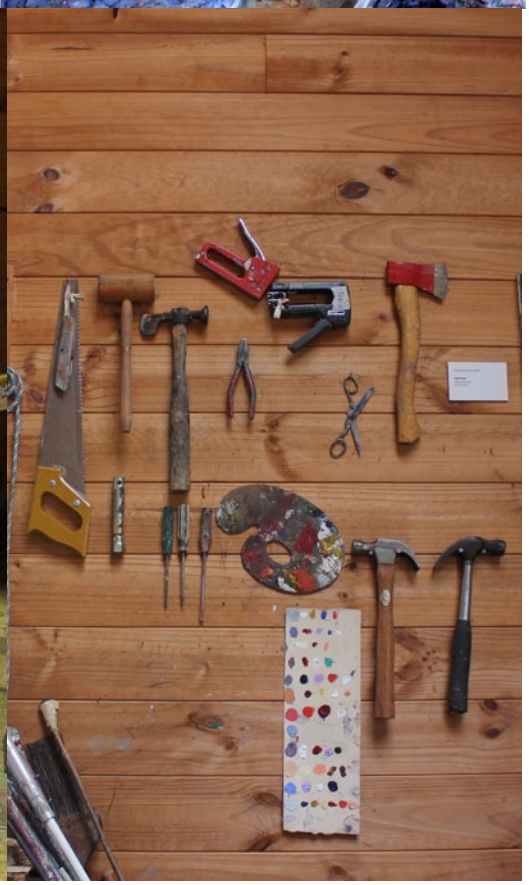
'The terrible thing about painting is that you are making a piece of furniture. Describing it that way isn't insulting to painters, it's a reflection on the attitude of the commercial world. The rare ones who buy something because they love it are very few. Most people buy a painting as an investment.'

An inventive artist

Arthur was a very inventive artist. If the tool he needed for particular mark making was not available, he would make it himself. In the studio can be seen long haired brushes, bristles from straw broom wrapped with wire, and long handles for charcoal and paint brushes. Paint scrapers, spatulas and palette knives were used to apply and scrape back the paint.

Throughout his life, Arthur made paints from raw pigments. A paint grinding and mixing machine is in one corner of the studio. For working on larger canvasses, Arthur required significant quantities of paint. He would create a sample of the colour required, and his studio assistant would mix the colour from dry pigments and linseed oil and fill lead tubes to use.

All the tools needed to produce canvas stretchers, stretch canvas to stretchers and prime the canvas, such as staple guns, mallets and pliers, are on the walls and shelves of the studio.



Colour charts and paints

Arthur Boyd used Art Spectrum oil paints. There remain supplies from when he worked in his studio. Art Spectrum is an Australian family company founded in 1966, dedicated to creating the finest possible artists' colours, manufacturing oils, watercolours, gouache, pastels and inks and associated mediums and primers. The hand-painted colour chart on the west wall would have been provided to Arthur for ordering paint in tubes, which was shipped from Melbourne. Art Spectrum named a colour 'Boyd Blue'after Arthur Boyd.

Art Spectrum Colour Chart, photo Bundanon Trust

The painter's palettes

There are a number of different palettes in the studio. Some rectangular hardboard and traditionally-shaped artists palettes would have been used for "plein air"painting, out in the field. The large moveable palettes on wheels, with glass tops and rag boxes underneath were Arthur's invention. These would have enabled him to move to different parts of the studio. The image below is of the main working palette in the studio, set out with different brushes and tools.

Transportable palette table, photo Bundanon Trust

Skulls and bones

The skull of the horse Flame is attached to the wall over the entrance door to the studio. Arthur had heard about the horse, which had been caught up in wire during a flood, and buried under a Coral Tree on the property. Arthur had the skull cleaned and placed in his studio. Other objects such as a thigh bone from cattle and a wombat skull also hang in the studio.

Where the hat lays...

On an old rustic cane chair hangs Arthur's painting shirt and jumper, above his hat and his much-fingered book ...

Ursula Hoff.

On the paint-splattered floor lie a pair of leather brogues that have seen better days. On a cane chair are Arthur's hats, jumpers and painting shirts, at right.

Fingermarks of oil paint can be seen on the light switches and the record player in the studio in the images below.

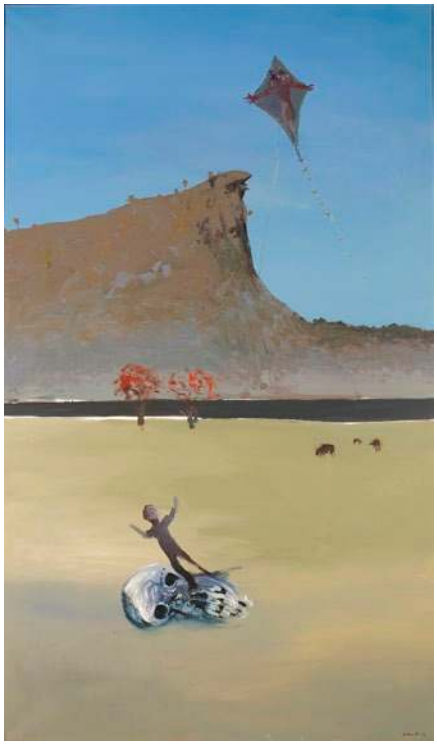
Studio artworks

Peter's fish and crucifixion, 1993

Arthur can be seen painting this work on the "Testament of a painter" DVD. Studio assistant Anna Glynn's partner Peter caught the fish. This work references biblical themes set in the Shoalhaven, and the geological feature on the escarpment opposite Bundanon, Pulpit Rock.

Pulpit rock, kite and skull, c1981

This painting investigates the theme of metamorphosis and what happens after death. During a time of flood a horse named Flame became trapped in some barbed wire and died from a heart attack. The horse was then buried under a coral tree in the paddocks. On hearing this story Arthur set about finding Flame and dug up the skeleton. Flame's skull hangs above the door of the studio and became a recurring image in Arthur's work. There are blue paint fingerprints on the skull.



Night of the piranhas, 1995

This painting relates to Arthur's comment in an interview about no longer being an artist but a maker of paintings. Arthur experienced some disillusionment with the arts industry.
The piranhas signify the pressures and demands he had on him, yet in the midst of the turmoil the two figures represent himself and Yvonne, as he has said it was Yvonne's love and support that got him through this stressful time in his life.
The little green frog can be interpreted as a voyeur, whimsical – a symbol of hope.

Arthur said: *Van Gogh never had a bluer sky than the Australian sky at night. There's nothing bluer. It's absolutely brilliant…you get a marvelous feeling looking up on a clear night at Bundanon. It is incredible., it's really beautiful, beautiful, wonderful…the stars are throwing light on the land.'*

Shoalhaven as the River Styx, 1996

This painting is on long term loan from the Boyd family. Arthur painted this image at his home in Ramsholt, Suffolk, towards the end of his life.

The River Styx, in Greek mythology, separates the world of the living from the world of the dead. Styx it is said winds around Hades (hell or the underworld) nine times. In ancient times some believed that placing a coin in the mouth or two coins in the eyes of the deceased, would pay the toll for the ferry to help it cross the Styx River safely, which would lead one to the entrance of the underworld.

Arthur was always interested in concepts around life and death, what happens after death and maybe in this painting he was contemplating his own mortality.

Prodigal son (incomplete), c1985-1995

This painting was inspired by the old testament story of the return of the prodigal son. Three figures are huddled in a make shift shelter in the lower left corner. The centre figure of the father is clothed in light blue and hugs the prodigal son who has red hair and dressed in green. The greedy, jealous brother handles gold coins. Boyd places the biblical story in an Australian bush context as seen in the landscape back ground and a blue sky. This painting was not completed. There is no signature on the painting.

This painting was a return to the subject matter that Arthur painted as a large mural on to the walls of his grandparents family home, The Grange, for his novelist Uncle Martin Boyd, when he was only 28 years old. Only fragments of this original mural still exist.

The Amphitheatre, 1993

A lone figure stands at the base of a massive bolder. He is boiling a billy on a small fire. Two people are half way up the rock on the left hand side. This painting refers to the awesome natural rock amphitheatre at Bundanon, where, in spring, the rock orchids grow. A snake is seen slithering down the rocks.

Macbeth and dagger, c1985

This was to be used as the cover image for a Melbourne Theatre Company production of Macbeth. In England during the 1960s, Arthur created set designs for operas.