



Art Sets.

The art that made me: Jude Rae

By the Art Gallery of NSW

In *The art that made me*, artists discuss works in the Art Gallery of NSW collection that either inspire, influence or simply delight them. This selection by Jude Rae first appeared in *Look* – the Gallery's members magazine.

Jude Rae was working out of the Art Gallery of NSW's Paris studio, ahead of a three-month residency in Italy courtesy of Bulgari, when *Look* tracked down the Sydney-based artist, described by Wayne Tunnicliffe, head curator of Australian art at the Gallery, as one of our 'great contemporary painters'.

'Opportunities like this are of enormous benefit to mid-career artists such as myself,' she says. 'I am building on experience, a depth of knowledge that can allow for more complex reflections than were possible for me as a younger person. I am absorbing the contemporary European environment, visiting the great collections, reflecting on my own practice and considering Australia from afar... especially with the writing I've been doing for you!' she added, after we asked her to share her favourite works in the collection.



UPLOADED IMAGE

https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.auhttps://media.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/uploads/artsets/2017_03/20160413JudeRae_147.tif

This painting by my father was part of his application for a NSW Travelling Art Scholarship the year I was born. He did not receive a scholarship, but the Gallery's collection website shows that it was acquired that same year, with a note stating 'the judges commended *Station blacks* as the best painting exhibited'. Dad was born in Glen Innes, NSW, on the tiny WWI Soldier Settlement block received (and later abandoned, like so many others) by my Gallipoli veteran grandfather. After WWII David trained as a wool classer, but by 1956 he was

working at the Australian Museum. The war in New Guinea, the shearing sheds of NSW, the culture of post-war Australia: all marked his psyche in ways that I reflect on now. He had seen the dark side of 'outback' Australia and, gifted student of 'realism' that he was, he would have tried to paint what he saw.



AGNSW COLLECTION David Rae *Station blacks* (1956) 9193
<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/9193/>

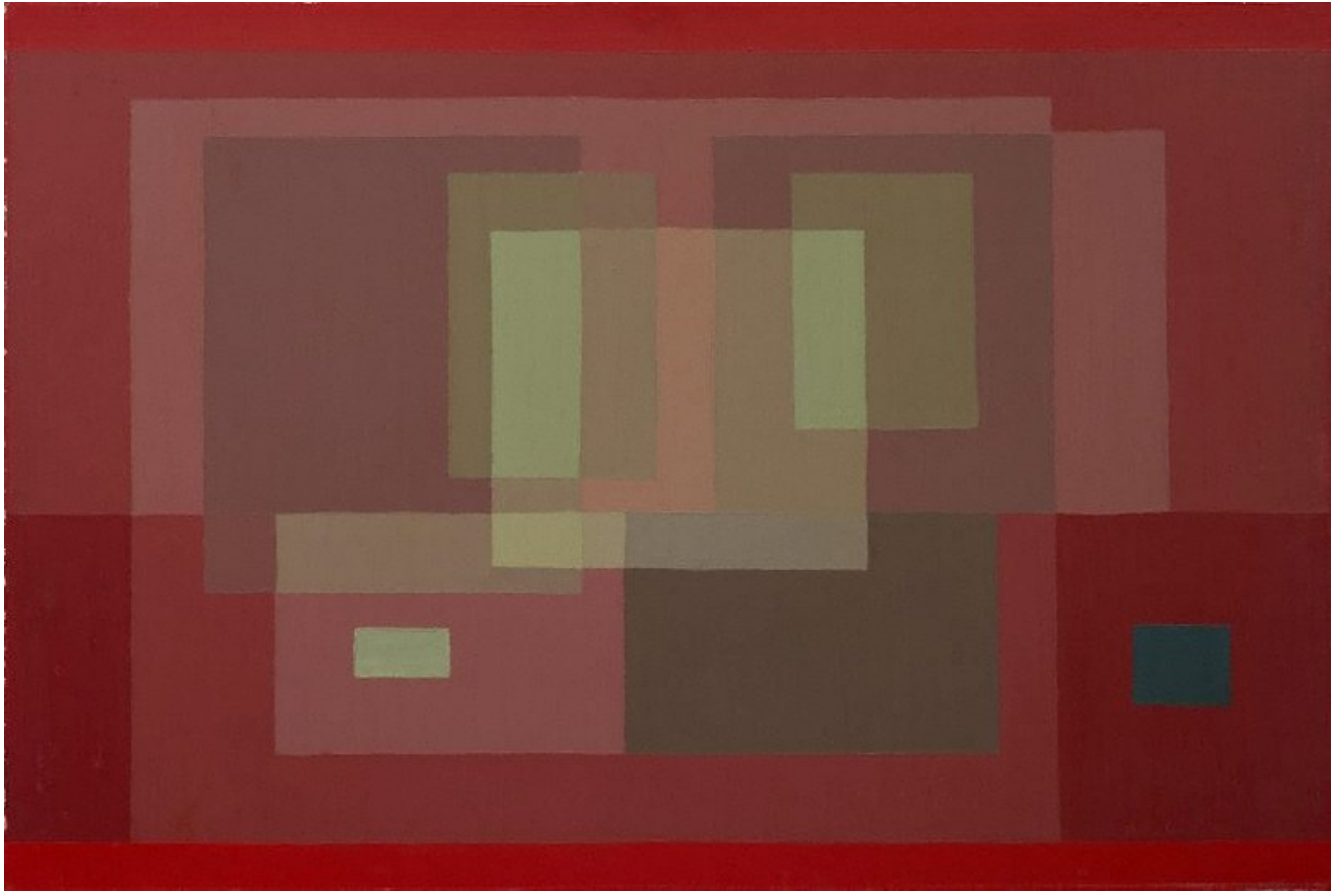
Turn off any country road at sunset and you will see the beauty of the Australian dusk, represented here with extraordinary sensitivity by David Davies, a Welsh visitor in the late 19th century. The muted colours and subtle tonal relationships of that fugitive light are rendered with a painterly touch that ranges from broad impasto to very fine, and the formal structure suggests the influence of Whistler. As a shy teenager I was transported by this quiet beauty which stood in stark contrast to my experience of beach culture in 1970s Sydney. I see it now in the light of my father's painting: it is land taken from its original inhabitants, cleared for grazing, denuded of native flora and fauna. Like it or not this vision of rural peace supports false and dangerous ideas that have again become dominant in politics. And yet the light is true, the beauty remains.



AGNSW COLLECTION David Davies *A summer evening* (circa 1895) 866

<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/866/>

A decade living in New Zealand taught me an appreciation of geometric abstraction, but even before that, this work by Ralph Balson had caught my eye. Initially, I was attracted by what Clement Greenberg might have described as ‘perceptual remainders’: the impression of transparency, and spatial illusion based on traditional perspective. While Greenberg’s fundamentalism does not interest me, I now think the enduring strength of Balson’s painting arises from formal qualities very similar to those that draw me to Morandi and Davies: the classical structure, a sense of harmony, the close relationships between colour and tone. These days it seems that the mid-century divide between representation and abstraction is perhaps giving way to something more interesting. There are still Non Objective purists of course, but to misquote Morandi: nothing is as abstract as painting.



AGNSW COLLECTION Ralph Balson *Abstraction* (1950) OA10.1965
<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/OA10.1965/>

Morandi painted this in the year I was born. Eventually I discovered him and so discovered what painting is for me. His famous comment 'Nothing is as abstract as reality' speaks volumes to a painter interested in the margins between representation and abstraction. I particularly love the work of the mid 1950s and this is a fine example. It has the tonal and chromatic subtlety for which Morandi is famous, as well as a selection of his very serious painterly 'jokes': the hidden orange object that pokes its way so rudely to the front, and false attachments of things either apparently joined to each other or suspended from the horizon. Morandi worked with an economy of means that is eloquent rather than abbreviated. His paintings quite simply defy description and to me this is the *raison d'être* of painting – to render us speechless.



AGNSW COLLECTION Giorgio Morandi *Still life* (1957) 431.1997
<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/431.1997/>

In the early 1970s I encountered Aboriginal bark paintings first hand in the collection of the Australian Museum, while working in the conservation lab. At that time, in that context, they were considered ethnographic objects but their material presence impressed me. When later I became aware of Thomas I was struck by the same material presence: the sense of touch and vision combined, but presented in a way that was somehow clearer. I did not understand it but I felt it. Hetti Perkins writes that it was about this time that Rover Thomas experienced the revelation that contributed to events that changed the course of contemporary art in Australia. Perkins describes Thomas's work as 'transcending Indigenous borders' and moving 'between figuration and abstraction'. This painting transformed Australia. We have much more to learn from Australia's first people but there is not much evidence that we are listening.



AGNSW COLLECTION Rover Thomas *Hills of Durham, Rover Country* (1984) 97.1995
<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/97.1995/>

<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/artsets/plbk4q/print>