

# VISUAL ARTS

## Case Study 3 – Practice

### Explain how artists refer to society and culture through their art works

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Society and culture have been the main concepts that have informed one's artmaking practice throughout history. Furthermore, this allows the artist to comment on humanity through the creation of their artworks. Artist Ben Quilty affirms the influence of his respective background to comment on human behavior. John Brack draws upon his upbringing in a working class family in a post war society to comment on the various rituals humanity takes part in. Wendy Sharpe mythically explores the role of women in traditional patriarchal structures. Indeed it is through their artworks that artists draw upon their backgrounds in order to communicate the inherent ideals of humanity.

Born in 1973 in Sydney, Ben Quilty draws on his own past to capture the values of Suburban youth culture through his artwork. *Elwood Torano no.7* gives insight into the cultural frame as it is the epitome of manhood – A car that's cheap to run, and easy to fix, whilst boasting fast bodily contours. Influenced by Al Back and the pop artists, Quilty intends to glorify mundane images through the use of his thick impasto brush strokes, suggestive of American Abstract expressionism. With reference to his art practice, Quilty seeks to find the quickest way of getting dense colour on the canvass, slapping on the image in less than 2 hours. He states "I love the surface", allowing drips and the excessive overuse of materials to dominate his artwork. This obsessive love of creating the thickest texture is also evident in his work 'van Rorschach' where he imprints a picture of a van onto another canvass producing a mirrored effect. His work is symbiotic of the pop art movement where everyday objects became elevated to the status of an artwork. Working initially from photos, he loosely draws his subject using aerosol paint before applying the thick oil paint. In order to create the image, he uses cake decorating tools, big brushes and pallet knives whilst wearing gloves and protective clothing. Moreover, he works up close to the image adding more paint when needing to change colour, resulting in vigorous brushstrokes mirroring the issues of masculine aggression that dominate our society today.

Born in 1920, Melbourne Artist John Brack grew during the 1930 Great Depression, a time in history that saw a worldwide economic downfall, resulting in a decline in personal income, trade, production and a significant increase in unemployment. John Brack, through his paintings, commented on the absurdity of the human condition in the way people undertake social rituals in modern day suburbia. This is portrayed in *Collins street 5 pm* where Brack captures the daily routine rush hour in post-war Melbourne. In the foreground, Brack deliberately portrays everyone walking in the same direction without any expression. The use of sharp lines and manufactured facial contours indeed complement the perpendicular lines of the structures in the background, emphasizing that these individuals are dehumanised by a new and dominating urban milieu. Brack is also satirically commenting on the 'Great Australian Dream' – the belief that home ownership proves one is successful and lives a better life. However the pursuit of attaining this dream is undermined through his use of subdued brown shades of colour and the uniformity of his figures. Appropriated from Manet, John Brack's *the Bar*, attempts to capture the 'Six O'clock Swill' - a social ritual that arose from the early closing of Australian bars. Brack also comments on society has society's habits of smoking and drinking as a common way to temporarily escape the monotony of life. But by presenting the figures in the background, we see that these drugs dehumanise one's individuality even more so.

Wendy Sharpe, Born in Sydney in 1960, explores how women and have been depicted and represented in society through the use of re-contextualising mythical legends. In Sharpe's 1994 composition 'Hercules and Omphale', Sharpe appropriates the Greek mythological story and places it into a contemporary context to comment on the patriarchal nature of society. Sharpe creates a gender swap by presenting Omphale as the 'common man' in society, sitting on the couch, drinking beer while watching the football. This is juxtaposed by Hercules who is knitting on the floor. While the image of her genitals are exposed, audiences are shocked but recognize that she is trying to

depict women as subject to male gaze. Archibald prize finalist, 'artist menaced by cupids' portrays Wendy Sharpe's struggle to paint her numerous ideas onto canvass. Sharpe's thick rich impasto brushstrokes, influenced by the suaves, portrays that she is consumed by her own inner thoughts. Sharpe also portrays the lack of financial gain as she draws herself using mirrors as it is more cost effective than hiring a model. Sharpe works with paint, gauche and pencils. Instead of taking photos, Sharpe draws her figures and then adds detail with a chalk pastel. She then repeats the process of adding blocks of tone and washing it back using paint with turpentine until she is satisfied. She often turns the picture upside-down to critique her work and if she isn't satisfied, she scrapes sections away and repeats them.