Teachers Resource Unit

RITA ANGUS 1908-1970

Cass: 1936

Goddess of Mercy: 1946-1947

759.
993
ANG

ROBERT McDOUGALL ART GALLERY

BOTANICAL GARDENS
TELEPHONE 365 0915
FAX 365 3942
PO BOX 2626, CHRISTCHURCH

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Concept, development and editing by Diana Beaumont, Ann Betts and Judith Hoult.

Painting analysis and design Diana Beaumont.

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Introduction to the Content & Use of this Teaching Resource.

We will be looking at 3 paintings by Rita Angus:

- *Cass 1936*
  Oil on canvas, 37.5 * 47.3 cm
  Collection: Robert McDougal ArtGallery, Christchurch

- *A Goddess of Mercy 1949- 1947*
  Oil on canvas, 86.6 * 61.1 .cm
  Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch

- *Rutu 1951*
  Oil on canvas, 71.2 * 55.2 cm
  Collection: Museum of New Zealand

You will receive - 3 colour slides
2 teaching units
-Cass: landscape
-A Goddess of Mercy & Rutu: portrait

The three Angus paintings are selected to give the students a wider knowledge of New Zealand art and in particular the work of one of our leading artists. The work is analysed to show the artistic process.

One particular idea, technique or concept is explored at a time.

The units are set out in diagrammatic format to assist the teacher's discussion or the students' practical work This format also makes them suitable for photocopying as worksheets, using as wall displays or as transparencies for an overhead projector.

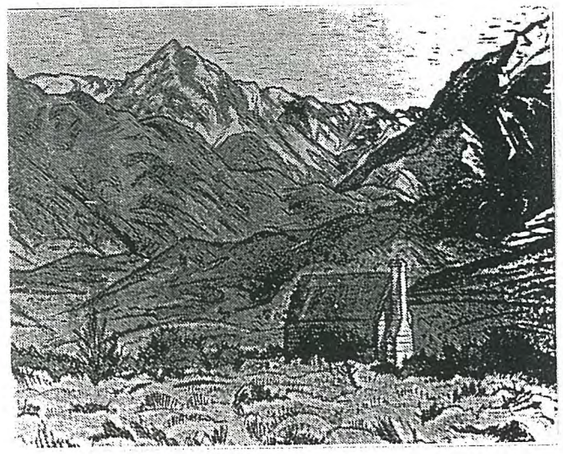
Teachers should be aware that each unit focuses on only one way to look at Angus's painting Most art works can be interpreted in many ways and this is only one way the painting could be approached. However students using this kitset will learn some new art concepts from studying a way in which Angus constructs her painting and will then be able to apply these ideas to their own work.

The kitset can be used in several sections of the art curriculum: *Sources of motivation, Making Art works, Knowing about Art*

DEVELOPMENT: From naturalism to structural patterns

These 2 examples of a Rita Angus landscape could help you see one way you could move from naturalistic observation to a more structured and ordered compostion.

Mountain, Cass 1936



This is a naturalist landscape, painted from life.

Rita Angus is recording from detailed observation what is in front of her. Note the repeating lines creating rhythms.

These paintings are to help you understand the way landscape forms are deliberately organised in Cass. You will notice how Cass is more structured than Mountain, Cass.

Mountain, Cass 1936

This is a studio version of the same view. She starts to emphasise patterns as she focuses more on compositional structure. This is best seen in the use of shapes.

Mountain, Cass 1936

These shapes have been outlined to make them easier to see. Note the strong changes of light and dark shapes.

COMPOSITION: STRUCTURE

Rita Angus has emphaised composition in the painting Cass 1936 . Composition is how the painting is constructed. We will focus firstly on structure; objects are arranged with structural lines to give a sense of order & create harmonious pattern.

Cass 1936: Major Structural Lines

Horizontal Divisions

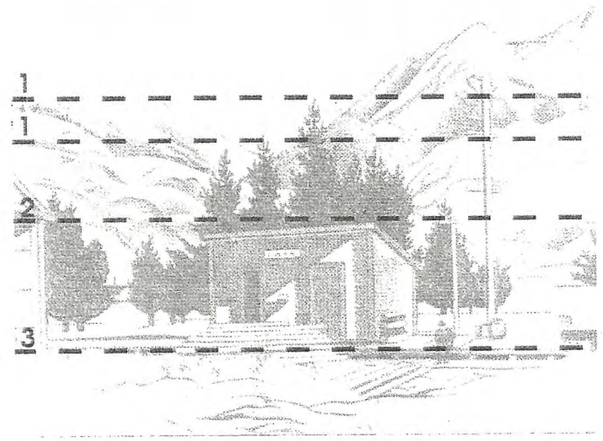
1
these lines show how the hills finish at the same horizontal line.

2
(mid-line)

the buildings line up with the mid- line.

3
base line

a stabilising base



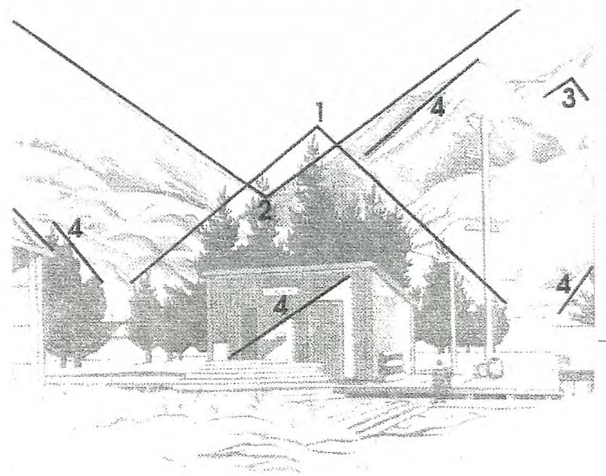
Triangles

major triangles

1
stable centralised equilateral triangle

a stable triangle and base are very classical mathematical structures.

2
reversed equilateral triangle moved off centre



minor triangles

3
Find & draw the minor triangles in the painting. One has been placed already.

4
repeated angle

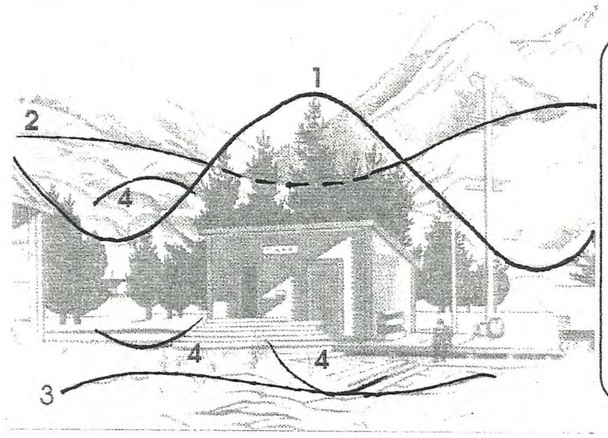
Curves

1
wave

2
wave (the reverse of the wave 1)

3
a variation of 2 wave

Following the line of wave 2 but is slightly flatter. This repetition creates a rhythm & helps to unify the forms.

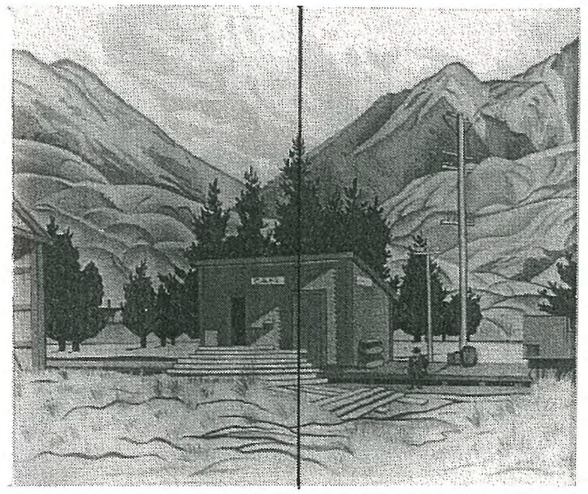


4
repeating rhythm of curves

There are more minor curves you could look for in the hills.

Verticals

Draw in the verticals you see.
The verticals are mostly coming from the base line & are spaced differently to create interesting rhythms.



(base line)

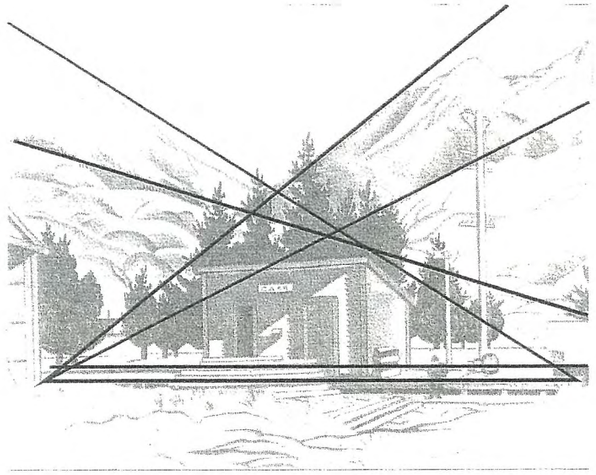
(mid-line)

Cass 1936: Dynamic Angles which focus on the base line

The ridges of the hills form large dynamic angles.

These angles are a vital element to counterbalance the stable equilateral triangle.

The hills are flat planes stacked behind each other, like stage flats.



EMPHASIS ON THE PICTURE PLANE

How space is organised

colour

- bright intense colours
- uniform intensity
  eg: yellow is still strong even in the midground
- distinct areas of colour
  eg: reds on the station building
  blue on the distant mountains

drawing (painting process)

- she drew the painting with paint, then built the painting through layers of paint, changing the shapes as necessary for the whole composition to work

concise outlines

- especially in the poles & the station

active patterns

- patterns formed through symmetry,
  eg: patterns formed by major triangles
- also the whole painting interrelates, creating an ordered pattern through colour, structure, shape & geometric forms,
  eg: active patterns of the brush stokes & constant colour unifies the trees

structure

- structurally the painting functions with equal weight, refer to the structural drawings

emphasis on geometric forms

- eg: the rectangle of the building, the triangular shadows, mountains & trees.

no single area dominates

The result from the above elements.

compressed space

- emphasis on picture surface rather than deep recession into space,
  eg: modeling has been reduced to line in the foreground & shapes in the background
- no aerial perspective
  eg: the blue in the hill has not softened in intensity

COMPARING COMPOSITION

Here we compare the composition of A Goddess Of Mercy 1946-1947 with Rutu 1951 another goddess painting.

Compositional Structure formed by the figure, hands & eyes.
A Goddess of Mercy 1946-1947

figure

The figure is centralised in a vertical format.

The figure creates a stable triangle.The triangle is reinforced by the two deer at the bottom.

hands

Hands act like directional arrows.

Here the hands are pointing to the crocus & are positioned centrally under the eyes. They are an important focual point.

eyes

We are drawn to look at the at the eyes in the painting.

We focus on eyes in reality a we can tell a lot more about the person by looking at their eyes.

Here a triangle is formed by linking the eyes of the two deer & the figure.

This triangle is vital to open up the picture, otherwise we would be too focused on her eyes & hands. Cover the deers' eyes to see the difference.

Rutu 1951

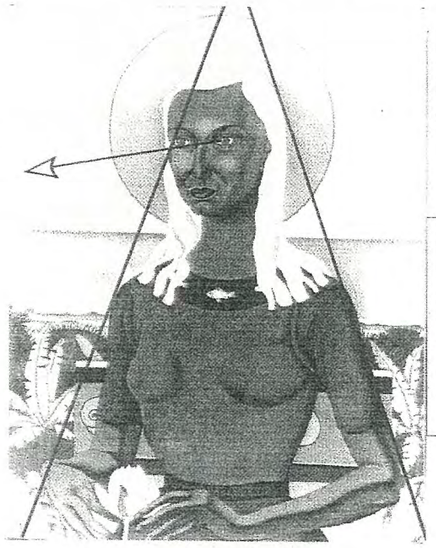
figure

Here the triangle is very strong.
The triangle is reinforced by the lines created by the arms.

hands

The hands stand out less as there is less contrast between the dark hands & dark background.

Instead the flower & hair are the focal points as they are very light within a dark painting.



eyes

Here the eyes look away from us so we do not connect so directly with her.

focal points are:
places the eye is drawn to, this could be through subjectmatter eg: eyes, or through high contrast of light and dark colour

Exercise: look at the two paintings then find & draw the repeating curved lines. These create rhythms.

Symmetry is
a repetition of similar things or parts facing each other
Symmetry is a way to create harmony, balance & order.

Repetiton of images creating symmetry

The basic structure of the painting is symmetrical. The horizontal bands are mirrored either side of the centrally placed figure.

See how there are repeated or reflected images in the equivalent place on the other side of the picture so the picture is equally balanced. If the images were pushed more to one side the picture would be asymmetrical.

list of repeated images
1= snow capped mountain
2= larger green mountain
3= small haystack
complete the list:
4=
5=
6=

Symmetry flattens space as a pattern is formed.

Exercise: Draw lines to the opposite corners to find out which is more central the crocus A Goddess of mercy or the fish in Rutu.
Their central position adds to the symmetrical composition.

Composite Landscape.
A composite painting involves putting together a combination of things seen in different places

Angus has brought together different pieces of landscape in this painting.

List each landform numbered in the diagram.
1= snow-capped mountain
2=
3=
4=
5=

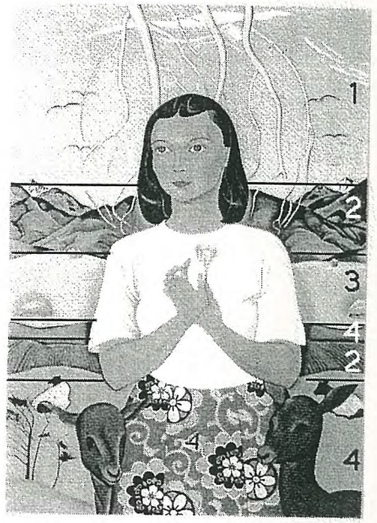
It is as though they have been cut out & stacked vertically.
There is no transition, eg: no merging colour between each type of landscape.
The big jump between landforms flattens the painting.
Things do not get smaller in the usual way. Look at how big the cow is compared to the tree in the left foreground.

COMPARING COLOUR

Distinct horizontal bands of colour

1= light blues; sky
2= browns; hills/ mountains
3= ochre; fields
4= greens; dress & fields
The repetition of this green on the dress in the foreground & on the fields in the bottom of the picture flattens the space. A different green is used in the hills in the background.

A Goddess of Mercy 1946-1947

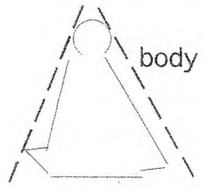


Groups of coloured shapes creating unity

- a repeated shape formed by the two dark brown deer
  two similar colours placed near each other creating unity.
- tan; fields
- ochre; arms

Exercise: paint the figure with pink skin rather than tan skin. What effect does this have?

Dominant areas of colour

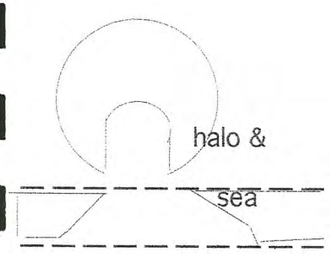


1= dark area

This roughly triangular area forms a stable base.

2= light shapes

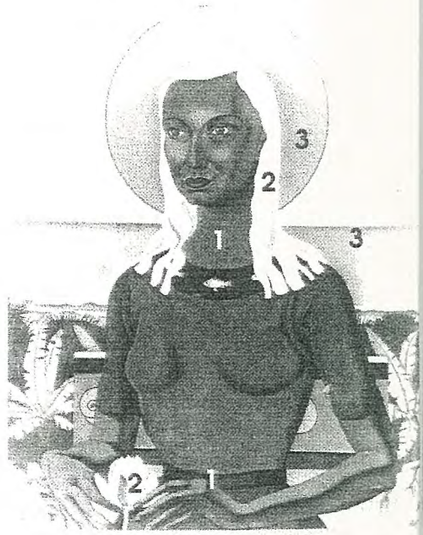
The light shapes are so dominant they lead the eye around the painting.



3= mid tone colours

The horizontal band of blue sea contrasts with the vertical figure.

Rutu 1951



Exercise: Find the dominant bands in Rutu.

Contrast

Looking at the two paintings, note how the hair & the halo or background changes colour to mainta contrast. A Goddess of Mercy has dark hair on light background. Rutu has light hair on a mid tone.

Exercise : Look for other light dark contrasts in the two paintings. You can see that choices are made between harmony or contrast & how light & dark can be placed in different places.

CONTENT: What the painting is communicating

Content involves all the parts of the painting including the subject, meaning, form, material, influences, symbolism and the artist's intention. The content requires interpretation, it is not just the subject matter. You need to think carefully about what the painting means to you.

development of an idea: artist's statement

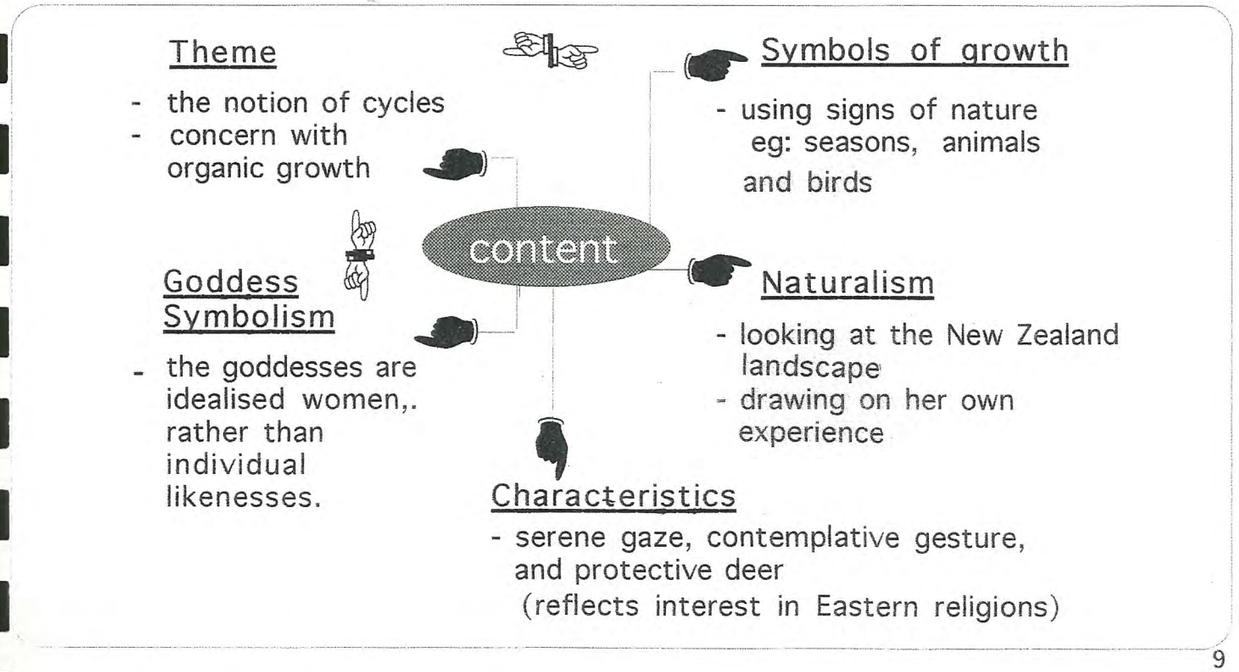
In 1947 the artist published her stance towards her working process & development of an idea:

"I like to paint with the seasons...
I usually work by blocking in my general ideas,
then leaving the painting for months, or years
& with notes, the ideas grow to a further stage."

Much later she was to note:
"First I have the idea & make not a detailed (that comes in the paint later) but a general sketch."

interpretation

Rita Angus's painting A Goddess of Mercy uses symbols, because they show a mystical & inward vision.
This creates a contemplative mystical painting, rather than just recording objectively what you see.



ROBERT
McDOUGALL
ART GALLERY
AND ANNEX

Botanic Gardens
Rolleston Avenue
P.O. Box 2626
Christchurch
New Zealand
Tel (03) 365-0915
Fax (03) 365-3942