

RITA ANGUS

LIFE & VISION

FOCUS QUESTIONS

The focus questions framed within this comprehensive exhibition provide an excellent resource for art teachers. The exhibition reveals how extraordinarily accomplished Rita Angus was as an artist and draws on new scholarship and thinking about her life and work. Students will be able to identify the major themes Angus explored over 40 years, and see how her commitment to pacifism and her strong feminist beliefs profoundly influenced her work.

The questions are intended both for teachers to use with students, and for self-guided work. The intended level is generic, offering teachers and students flexibility to choose what is useful for them to achieve a new understanding of Angus's life and work. The questions are framed in two sections. The first focuses on selected elements and principles of the visual arts which can be applied to all of Angus's work. The second section includes questions that are content-specific, intended for guiding students through selected works within the exhibition.

Additional information about the works, including audio commentary, wall texts and zoomable images, is available on the exhibition website:

<http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/ritaangus>



Questions to ask about Rita Angus's artworks

Colour:

What colours has Angus used?

How could you describe those colours?

Angus has been referred to as 'cranking up the pallet' ... what does this mean and why might she do this?

What effect has been achieved through Angus's use of complimentary colours?

Tone:

When looking at colour, can you see any tonal differences?

How could you create the same colour tone?

How has she used colour tones to convey meaning?

Line:

Where are the horizontal and/or vertical lines in Angus's work?

Where do the lines lead your eye?

Form:

What kinds of shapes can you see in Angus's work?

Do the shapes remind you of anything?

To what extent is form literal and/or symbolic for Angus?

How has Angus used brush work to either flatten, or reflect light?

Balance:

How has Angus achieved balance in her work?

Harmony:

Choose an artwork which has a harmonious quality. What are the features that contribute to this sense of harmony?



Nine selected works for focus questions

Early years 1929-39



Self-portrait 1929

oil on canvas

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, on loan from the Rita Angus Estate

Rita Angus painted this self-portrait while she was still an art student.

- What does this portrait say about the artist?
- Looking closely at her face, what might she be thinking?



Cass 1936

oil on canvas on board

Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, purchased 1955

This painting shows a small railway station in the Southern Alps. It was recently voted New Zealand's greatest painting.

- What can you see in the background, mid-ground, and foreground?
- What kind of day do you think it is?
- Can you describe the weather?
- What can you say about the man sitting on the platform?
- What might the man be thinking?



Cleopatra 1938

oil on canvas

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, purchased 1998 with New Zealand Lottery Grants Board funds

Here Rita Angus paints herself as Cleopatra. Her face is shown in profile and her body is positioned frontally, in a way that recalls Egyptian art.

- In what ways is this self-portrait similar to Rita Angus's *Self-portrait 1929*?
- In what ways is it different?
- Why do you think she painted herself as an ancient Egyptian queen?
- If you were going to make a self-portrait pretending to be someone from history, who would you be?



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A pacifist vision 1938-58



Central Otago 1940

oil on board
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of Mrs Joyce Milligan in memory of Dr RRD Milligan, 1984

This painting is made up of several different scenes of Central Otago. It was painted at the beginning of World War Two.

- In what ways is this painting similar to *Cass* 1936? How is it different?
- Why do you think the artist included the church in the foreground?
- What other symbols can you see in the painting?



Portrait of Betty Curnow 1942

oil on canvas
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1970

Betty Curnow was a good friend of the artist. This portrait of her includes symbols of motherhood, family, and history.

- What symbols can you see that represent motherhood, family and history?
- What kind of things would you want included in a portrait of you?
- Why would you include those things?



Rutu 1951

oil on canvas
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, purchased 1992 with New Zealand Lottery Board funds

Here, Angus portrays herself as a Pacific goddess, one who promotes peace, womanhood, multiculturalism and spirituality.

- What are the similarities and differences between *Rutu* and Angus's other self-portraits?
- What kinds of symbols can you see in the painting?
- What might Rita have wanted to tell us with this painting?



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Late journeys 1958-70



Self-portrait with Fruit 1960-61

watercolour

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, purchased 1998 with New Zealand Lottery Grants Board funds

Showing herself in her surroundings, Rita Angus uses this self-portrait to convey ideas of creativity, spirituality, and peace.

- What might Angus be thinking and/or feeling in this painting?
- What time of the year does this painting reflect? How can you tell?
- How does Angus convey the ideas of creativity, spirituality and peace?
- What are the similarities and differences between this work and her other self-portraits?



Fog, Hawke's Bay 1966-68

oil on hardboard

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1969

This work was based on sketches that Angus did on bus trips from Wellington to Hawke's Bay. She wanted the painting to give a sense of movement, of travelling through the landscape.

- How do you think she suggests movement and travel in this painting?
- When you look at this painting, where does your eye travel to?
- How many visual paths can you find before you see the truck?



Flight 1968-69

oil on hardboard

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, purchased 1970 from Wellington City Council Picture Purchase Fund

This was one of the last works Angus painted. It was inspired by the destruction of the Bolton Street cemetery in Wellington, one of the artist's favourite places. The dove is from a tombstone, set free in flight.

- As well as protesting at the destruction of the cemetery, what else do you think Angus was trying to say in this painting?
- What symbols can you find, and what might they represent?
- Why do you think the headstones are on the shoreline?
- How is this painting similar and/or different to other landscapes by Angus?

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