

# Rosalie gascoigne, australian artist essay sample

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“ Art doesn’t come from nowhere; it comes from a long line of human experience”-Rosalie Gascoigne

Rosalie Gascoigne was a New-Zealand and Australian sculptor who worked and lived in Canberra. She moved to Australia when she was 26 in 1943 to marry her husband, Ben Gascoigne, who was an Australian astronomer. She was born on the 25th of January 1917 in New-Zealand and died in 1999 on the 23rd of October in Australia. She never had any formal art training or education. Her art career began when she started flower arranging also known as the traditional Japanese art form of Ikebana yet she only became known as an artist in her late fifties. By the late 1960’s Gascoigne had become tired of the old art form and wanted to move onto more expressive and creative art styles as she began to realize her potential. She began using old bits of scrap metal and old wood and assembled small sculptures. She finds these materials while hiking and scavenging in the Canberra hinterlands. With this inspiration she continued to work with a wider variety of materials, all which she has found while searching around hills and forests.

These materials included bright orange road signs, drink crates, Schweppes cartons, wire, feathers, floral lino, galvanised tin and iron. In her works she mostly re-contextualizes these materials sometimes by mixing them together or taking one material apart and creating an assemblage piece on a flat plane. For example her 1987 work “ Tiger Tiger” made with a mix of bright yellow road signs cut into pieces and arranged together. Rosalie Gascoigne uses her works to relate to audiences with her representation of her previous experiences of living in both New-Zealand and Australia. We <https://assignbuster.com/rosalie-gascoigne-australian-artist-essay-sample/>

can link this to the growing environmental movements within Australia and the raising awareness to recycle and go green. This become controversial issue in Australia during the 1970's and 80's during the height of Gascoigne's career. Gascoigne uses materials and gives them a new use, so it is fair to say she is recycling these materials.

Gascoigne's style to me is quite avant-garde in recent history of Australia. She was one of the first artists to bring new and exciting styles of re-contextualizing everyday materials and placing them on a canvas. Not many other artists had tried this before and this offered a new attraction to Australian sculpture. One of her most important career achievements was attending the Venice Biennale for Australia in 1982. The Venice biennale is a major contemporary art exhibition that occurs once every two years. Her other notable career highlights include the Sydney biennale of 1988, becoming a member of the Order of Australia in 1994, winning the Grand Prize at the Chenju Pre-Biennale, Korea in 1995 and was given a retrospective of her work at the New South Whales art gallery in 1997 touring to the National Gallery of Australia in 1998.

She was influenced largely by Norman Sparnon and Sofu Teshihagara as the very start of her art career. Norman Sparnon, who was a Japanese trained Australian expert in ikebana, trained Gascoigne in 1962. The knowledge she took from this was very helpful when in 1967, Sofu Teshihagara, founder of the school of Ikebana visited Canberra and singled out her work praising it for its artistic sense.

She was also influenced by Michael Taylor, a young painter who taught Gascoigne at the Canberra school of Art. Gascoigne's inspiration for her art was not all due to her natural talent in Ikebana. Her perception of landscape was what made her famous. She represented what the landscape made her feel and we are able to see this in her works such as metropolis, earth 1, southerly buster and nature's way. This was her works purpose. She has done this with her choice of colours, material and placement within her works which we have seen in metropolis. Earth 1

### Earth 1

Two works that I feel are very original in Australian assemblage but I also find interesting are her works earth 1 and metropolis. These works together give a contrast of her two experienced lifestyles of city life to rural life and act as a conduit. She conveys stressed, trapped and busied emotions in metropolis with her compact placing of text across the work while earth 1 allows you to feel at ease, more relaxed with use of light, subtle browns and blues, common colours of farming areas. She communicates her experiences of her difficult and rushed childhood, constantly moving around never settling and the fragility of it all through the careful placement of road sign pieces with words jumping out at you like, slowly, closed, ahead or traffic. Words we constantly see in busy city life or even experience. She increases this tension by flipping the words upside down, cutting them short, overlapping them and using a fitting title of metropolis.

However earth 1 offers a different meaning that most of us can relate to even if we reside in the city. The light contrast of colours and hue is relaxing

yet comforting. The mixes of rusty browns to cloudy blues are simplified colours of rural landscape that is commonly scene while driving one or two hours out of most cities. The title also reinforces ideas about rural, open, untouched land. It allows audiences to relate and emphasize with Gascoigne's experiences of the transition of a busy lifestyle to her final residence in the hills of Canberra. I can relate to and understand these works but this understanding is reinforced with my prior knowledge of Gascoigne's life and previous works. These works definitely portray aspect of Gascoigne's personality as a communicative, adaptable and diligent artist. Gascoigne at work

Gascoigne at work

Earth 1 is constructed from builders form board, a type of thick pre-painted plywood used to construct concrete floors, walls and columns which give the work its colours. She gathered these materials from a construction site after seeing a load of the stuff chucked into the waste bin. It is important to note the way Gascoigne chooses her materials. She is finding common junk and using it as an art piece. Many of the works are representations of the eye of the beholder or what the work and materials mean to that person. It is very fitting to say that one man's junk is another man's treasure when looking at Gascoigne's works. Form board was the last type of material that Gascoigne used before her death in 1999. She cut out sixteen square form board pieces and glued them tightly together.

She uses visual conventions of birds I view and elements of shape which together represent images seen from high above of ploughed muddy farm

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fields, river banks, quarries, country roads and cattle yards all of which Gascoigne saw while traveling by plane between Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Implied texture helps reinforce this image as the colours are not completely pure, they are patchy and scratched. Thus order and placement are important in the work. The colours play important roles, symbols of churned earth and soil, stone, sand and rubble all of which are representation of the cycles of life, of change and renewal. Gascoigne's use of close colour, size and placement relationships offer the work balance. As well as balance unity which is also achieved through positive space and the many connecting and crossing lines that run through the art piece.

Metropolis

Metropolis

Metropolis is a mind racing, road map of words. Positive space is used very effectively to draw emotions from the audiences as she fills the viewing space with words in all angles which to me races emotions and allows you to feel stressed as if you were in a metropolitan area. This piece has been created by carefully cutting these signs into pieces and then layering them above one another. Each piece glued carefully. The words in the work although appearing random have been placed specifically by Gascoigne. She emphasises letters and words through size relationships. R, U, D, O, RACK and ROAD all jump out at you. By doing this she reminds us of the way road signs attract our attention. In some ways this use of size relationships and flipping the words and letters in different is similar to a map. The geometric lines bordering these words and letters help reinforce this image. Two

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colours are seen in the work, yellow and black. Yellow is mostly symbolic of happiness or fun but is also a colour that attracts attention which is why they are the main colour on most road signs.

We can relate this to the title of the work metropolis. In my experience cities that are busy and full of people are exciting, fun and entertaining. Yellow is a symbol of how cities attract many people just like it did for Gascoigne as she travelled from New-Zealand to Adelaide, Sydney and Canberra. Black in this context could symbolise roads or buildings. Generally cities these days are grey in colour. Shape is important and also symbolises cities and modern structures. Gascoigne uses geometric patterns of the letters to symbolise this. As I have discussed earlier, Gascoigne's works were largely a representation of many landscapes she encountered through her life and the emotions she received from each of these. For example metropolis becomes an example of the city landscape, bustling and busy while earth 1 becomes a landscape of open farmland, relaxed just like her isolated home in Mount Stromlo.

Each work gives off emotions of mostly being stressed or being relaxed and represents the changing emotions we can feel through the land. It is important to recognise how Gascoigne has achieved this. She did it through her choice of materials. She has used common every day materials such as road signs and form board and turned them into an art form. She is able to use a material that we don't think twice about such as a road sign other than following its purpose and uses it to tell a story. Rosalie Gascoigne's work gave me a new perspective on sculpture and Australian art. I had never seen someone use materials as she had done but also use them in such a way

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that she could tell stories about her own life and experiences while also allowing people to relate to her works. She presents interesting ways in which artists; particularly sculptures can use materials as she has done by putting them on a canvas format.

Rosalie Gascoigne has influenced me as she has taught me how to re-contextualize materials to give them new meaning. That is what I have done with my current art piece by making a person out of bones. I am able to represent a new image of the human body but also of the Australian identity with the symbolism of bones. I have done this very similarly as Gascoigne did with her works by walking the earth and finding these materials. The bones are a symbol of death but also strength and resistance to the harshness of the land as they continue after many years to hold their structure and not break down. This is an aspect of the Australian identity of being tough and strong in difficult times. With influence of Gascoigne's work I have chosen to create the form of the human body and am able to generate meaning with the re-contextualization of bones.

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