

WAYS OF SEEING WORKSHOP©

A practical two-hour workshop that explores the ways different cultures form their own ways of seeing the world through the context in which each is formed.

Alison Carroll

Reading: Edward Said *Orientalism* (first chapter)

Alison Carroll *The Revolutionary Century, Art in Asia 1900-2000* (first chapter)

The workshop today introduces one facet of humanity: the deep desire to portray, and therefore understand, the place in which we live: our seeming universal need to visualise the space in which we live our lives.

Different cultures have developed this differently. The workshop looks at how 5 societies, and it could be 500 societies, do this. It takes the example of place, or more specifically landscape. A bush is not the same bush to different cultures. It is why the workshop is called “ways of seeing”.

But it isn't just about landscape. In other visual arts it could be landscape, or still life, or sculpture, or textiles. It could be theatre, or music or poetry or prose. It could be education systems, legal systems, housing, family order, language, government. It is an example of the importance of difference cultural context. It is about why, and how, and what we do to make each culture work for us.

The five cultures very generally are: European, Chinese, Indian (or really Rajasthani), Balinese and Aboriginal Australian. At the end of the introduction, the participants are asked to draw the landscape seen from the (high office) window in four of these ways.

Why would those 5 cultures see the places in which they live differently. The first reason is history, the second geography, and the third is the role or purpose each culture puts on its development of the way of seeing the land around them. It is the societal aspect. In the West, the purpose is often literal or scientific; in the China the role of landscape is to create an ideal, or a idealised feeling or emotion; in India it is telling a story – the role of narrative; in Bali it is also story telling, but with a very definite eye on foreign tourists and their interests; for Aboriginal Australia, and only shown is central desert work, it is about affirming cultural allegiance, about telling stories, and about survival.

In brief

The workshop has three components:

1. An introductory talk of 45 minutes about the way five cultures depict the world around them.
2. The participants are given 4 large sheets of butcher's paper and charcoal and draw the same view from the window in 4 of the styles described. They have one hour to do this.
3. They each show their work and talk about what was difficult and easy in the exercise. This takes 20 minutes.

Number of participants: it works well for around 15-20 people.

Needs:

- a room with a view and space, and tables, for 20 participants to lay their paper and look out and draw.
- A laptop and screen
- 4 pieces of butcher's paper x participants, and charcoal
- an open and willing attitude from the participants.

Note: it is not about ability to draw; the only rule is no-one is allowed to say “I can't draw”.