

Artist

Grace Cossington Smith (1892–1984)



Landscape with trees, oil on board, 65 x 45cm, 1947
(Collection of SCEGGS Darlinghurst.)

Information about Grace Cossington Smith

In the early days when I was a student with Signor Rubbo we had very interesting lunch hours, because he always read something interesting to us about the contemporary painters of that time, Cezanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh and others. ...

I used to go out and sketch, make a drawing, not a very detailed one but just with the forms, and I'd put a little note as to the colour and then I came home and painted it in my studio. Afterwards, I wanted to paint from the thing itself and that is how I paint now, really, from the subject itself.

My chief interest, I think, has always been colour, but not flat crude colour, it must be colour within colour, it has to shine; light must be in it, it is no good having heavy, dead colour. ...

I use squares in the way I paint, not from a conscious way but it came to me naturally because I feel in that way that light can be put into the colour, whereas just to put colour on to the surface in a flat way, I feel that it gives it a dead look. ... (From: Interview by Hazel de Berg Sydney, 1965)

Studying

Cossington Smith is considered Australia's foremost modernist painter of the early 20th Century. She was inspired by the European Post-Impressionists; Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh after seeing colour reproductions while attending Dattilo-Rubbo's art classes. She channelled a modernist approach in her artwork, reducing forms to their basic elements, emphasising colour and rhythmic elements, outlining shapes and simplifying the composition. Her subject matter was more traditional and included still life, flower studies, portraits, interiors, cityscapes and bushland viewed from her garden studio window in the semi-rural North Shore suburb of Turramurra, Sydney.

- Cossington Smith's 1916 portrait "*The Sock Knitter*" is considered Australia's' first modernist painting. Characteristics of Modernism and Post-Impressionism are still evident in her painting *Landscape with trees* created three decades later. Compare both artworks. What are the long-lasting influences of Post-Impressionism on Cossington Smith's style? <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/OA18.1960/>
- Cossington Smith said, "*My chief interest, I think, has always been colour, but not crude flat colour, it must be colour within colour, it has to shine; light must be in it, it is no good having heavy, dead colour.*" Like other Modernist artists, she embraced the emotional and spiritual effects of colour. Find out about Beatrice Irwin's 'New science of colour'; and consider how Grace Cossington Smith applied this to her landscape paintings?

Making

The '*alla prima*' technique (applying wet-on wet paint) allowed Grace Cossington Smith to work quickly completing a painting in a single sitting. Paint a landscape viewed through a window using '*alla prima*'.