

THE GLASS MICHAEL ZAVROS

TWEED RIVER ART GALLERY 29 JUNE - 12 AUGUST 2012

There was a rough stone age and a smooth stone age and a bronze age, and many years afterward a cut-glass age.

F. Scott Fitzgerald



Red Diamond/First you make your heart a stone 2007
oil on board
15 x 15cm
Private Collection

If one were to hold a mirror up to a mirror, one might see eternity and hear the echo of timelessness, like the static encountered when searching for a radio station echoes the universe imploding millennia ago. In the work of Michael Zavros, collected reflectively in *The Glass*, the mirror reoccurs as a visual and metaphoric trope, a device through which we may literally view the artist's work as either a narcissistic folly or a serious meditation on self-criticism.

The Glass includes a myriad of reflective moments: a blackened bronze mirror in which we may never see ourselves, but which may bear witness to our deepest darkest souls; a baroque hall of mirrors incongruously stacked with shiny gym equipment that offers a *trompe l'oeil* reflection; architectural follies emerging from enchanted formal gardens and lakes, obsessive fashion gestures that hold a mirror to contemporary culture and an etching that depicts the artist's signature initials as they disappear in an illicit moment of self-indulgence.

Showcasing the work of one of Australia's leading contemporary artists, *The Glass* explores the meaning of Zavros' work and challenges our interpretation of his hyper-realistic practice.

THE GLASS | MICHAEL ZAVROS

EDUCATION RESOURCE

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INTRODUCTION

The Glass / Michael Zavros is a Tweed River Art Gallery initiative exhibition, curated by Susi Muddiman and Michael Zavros.

ABOUT THIS EDUCATION RESOURCE

This education resource is intended as a starting point for generating ideas and classroom activities before, during and after a visit to *The Glass / Michael Zavros*. It is intended to complement the exhibition and be used in addition to information provided in the exhibition catalogue essay and the exhibition artwork.

The resource includes an introduction to the exhibition, suggested points for discussion and practical activities for primary and secondary school students.

Teachers can either select relevant sections of this resource to compile their own exhibition response sheet for students prior to their planned visit, or use the attached worksheets.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

It is an honour for Tweed River Art Gallery to present this captivating exhibition showcasing the artistic practice of Michael Zavros. The works assembled in *The Glass* span the breadth of Zavros' oeuvre over a 14 year period, specifically investigating the artist's interpretation of reflection.

Although I have followed the artist's practice for many years now, *The Glass* has prompted me to consider Zavros' work from an audience's perspective.

Curating this exhibition in close collaboration with the artist has required me to consider how best to showcase this artist's impeccable attention to detail, unique command of different media, his ongoing critical project and his wry sense of humour. I hope *The Glass* reflects more than just the surface of things.

Susi Muddiman
May 2012

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Artistic Beginnings

When I was nine, my parents invested in painting lessons. Every Saturday morning I would go to Mr Scott's for two hours where I learnt how to paint in oils. We painted landscapes and sea scapes mostly, and occasionally flowers or clowns. While we worked Mrs Scott would play her organ for us then make us morning tea.

Sometimes she called me Steven by mistake. I worked very hard to make my paintings look real, and soon I joined the adult class on Wednesday nights. The class consisted of mostly older ladies who offered me many helpful suggestions, such as "Cobalt with a little red makes a lovely warm sky" and "Always add mauve to your mountains".

Michael Zavros
April 2000



BIOGRAPHY

Michael Zavros was born in 1974 and graduated from Queensland College of Art with a Bachelor of Visual Arts in 1996.

Zavros' international exhibitions include *Selectively Revealed*, an Asialink and Experimenta Media Arts touring exhibition of Korea, Indonesia and Thailand in 2011/2012, *New Nature* at Govett Brewster Gallery, New Zealand in 2007, *Uncanny (the unnaturally strange)*, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand and *Quiet Collision: Current Practice/Australian Style*, Associazione ViaFarini, Milan, Italy 2003.

Zavros' group exhibitions include *Wilderness* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2010, *Scott Redford Vs Michael Zavros* at the Institute of Modern Art, 2010, *Contemporary Australia: Optimism* at the Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2008, and *Primavera* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney 2000.

Solo exhibitions include *The Good Son: Works on Paper*, a survey exhibition in 2009 at Gold Coast City Art Gallery, *Everything I wanted* at the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane in 2003/2004 and *Egoiste* at Wollongong Regional Gallery, 2007.

He has been the recipient of several international residencies including the Australia Council Milan studio residency in 2001, and the Barcelona studio in both 2005 and 2010. In 2003 he was awarded a Cite International des Arts Residency in Paris through the Power Institute, University of Sydney. In 2004 he was awarded a studio residency at the Gunnery Studios, Sydney, from the NSW Ministry for the Arts.

Michael Zavros has won three major Australian drawing prizes: the 2002 Jacaranda Acquisitive Drawing Award, the 2005 Robert Jacks Drawing Prize and the 2007 Kedumba Drawing Award. He was the recipient of the 2004 MCA Primavera Collex Art Award.

In 2010 he was awarded the Doug Moran National Portrait Prize, the world's richest prize for portraiture and in 2012 he was awarded the inaugural Bulgari Art Award through the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

His work is held in numerous private and public collections, including The National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Queensland Art Gallery, University of Queensland Art Museum, Artbank, National Portrait Gallery, Collex, ABN AMRO, Griffith University Art Collection, Gold Coast City Art Gallery, Grafton Regional Gallery, Newcastle Art Gallery, Tweed River Art Gallery, Wollongong City Art Gallery and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

THE WORK

MEDIUM AND TECHNIQUES

Painting
Drawing
Sculpture
Printmaking
Film

STYLE

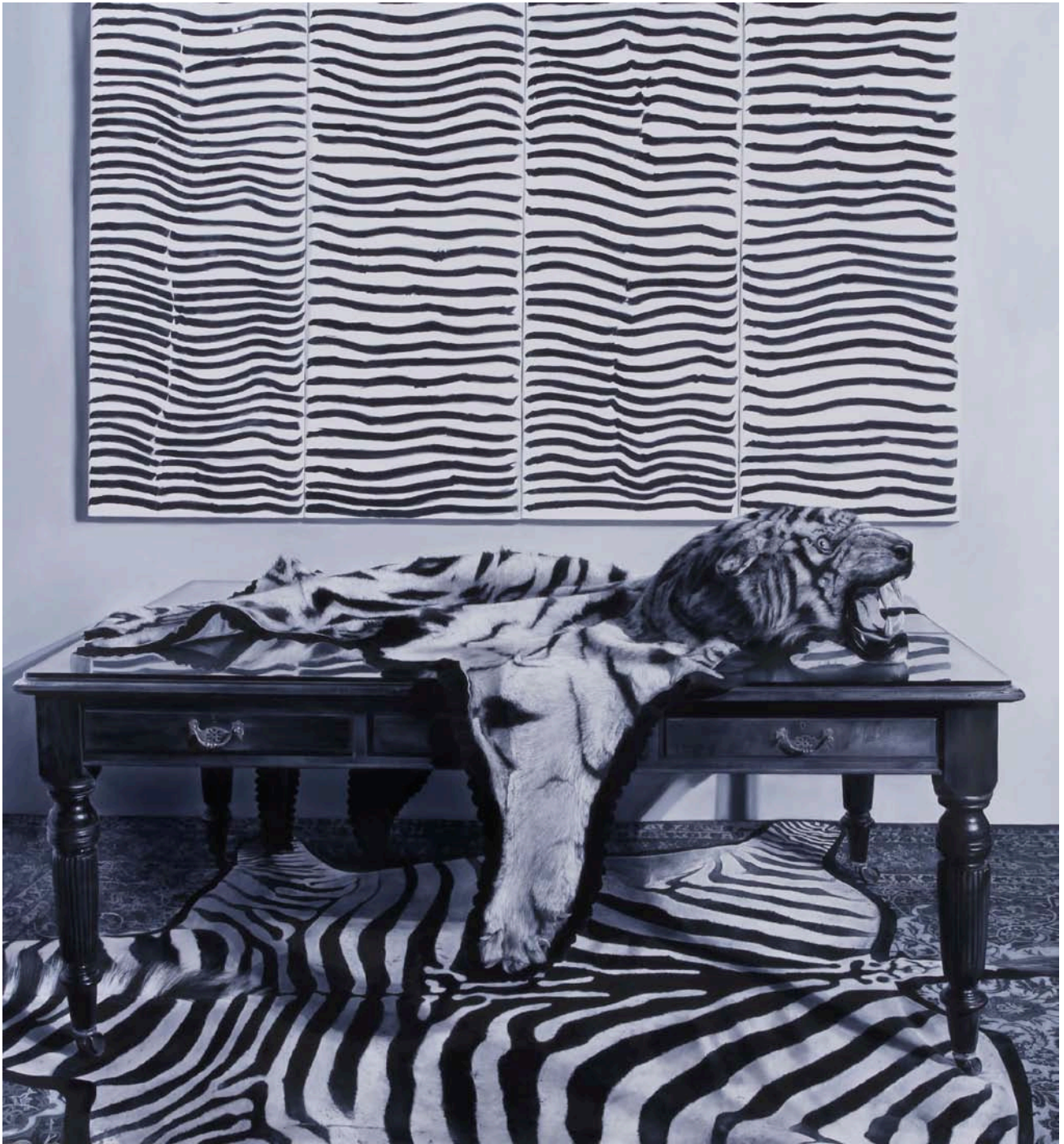
Hyperrealism

THEMES AND CONTENT

Animals
Beauty
Collecting
Consumer goods
Desire
Europe
Excess
Family
Fashion
Him Self
History
Impermanence
Infinity
Lifestyle
Maleness
Mythology
Permanence
Reflection
Status
Time
Tradition
Narcissism
Vanity
Wealth



Black Orchid - Paphiopedilum Vanitas 2008
bronze (ed. 9)
64 x 42.5 x 42.5cm
Collection of the artist





Body Lines 2011
oil on canvas
210 x 195cm
Collection of Alan Conder and Alan Pigott

A study in endangered species and **isomorphism**, the interior *Body Lines*, 2011, juxtaposes a striated painting by the late **Emily Kame Ngwarreye** with stripped animal skins (from a tiger and its possible prey, a zebra). While we recognise the Ngwarreye as blue chip trophy art (like Zavros's own paintings), it's hard to forget the disposition of Australia's traditional owners – the fact that these works were produced in a situation of abject poverty. As the striped Ngwarreye was based on ceremonial body painting, the juxtaposition also suggests a distasteful link between Aboriginal skins and trophies of the hunt. (Of course, tiger-skin trophies are a reminder of the British Raj period of Imperial rule India prior to independence) ¹.

LOOKING AND THINKING	MAKING AND DOING
K-2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michael Zavros has made a painting of objects that you may find in someone's house. What can you see? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw as many things or animals that you can think of that have stripy patterns.
3-6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look carefully at this painting and describe what you see? What do you think connects all the objects in this painting? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think carefully about what is in your bedroom or lounge room. What is your favourite thing in the room? Think about why it is so important. Draw a picture of it.
7-9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What element in this work has traditional Aboriginal significance? Investigate. Why do you think the artist has placed this element with the other objects in this painting? What clues does the title of the painting give us? Discuss. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What objects can you find around your home that have textured, patterned or decorative surfaces? Are these surfaces man made or natural? Draw, scan or photograph (in black and white) a close up section of these surfaces to compile a series of these tonal patterns.
10-12 Conceptual framework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How might different audiences respond to this painting? Discuss the role of the art critic/writer and how they can bring different meanings to an artworks' interpretation. 	Practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michael Zavros is a skilled draughtsman. His drawings and paintings are executed carefully and reveal the surfaces and texture of objects in great detail. Carefully draw tonally in pencil or charcoal an interior from your home, or from an interior design magazine. Investigate the meaning or possible significance of the furniture and objects from these interiors.

1. Michael Zavros: *Charm Offensive*, Robert Leonard, *Art in Australia*, Volume 49 #1 2011





V12 *Narcissus* 2009
oil on board
20 x 29.5cm
Collection of the artist

Refer to Andrew Frost's paragraph to this work in his catalogue essay for a writer's/critic's interpretation of this painting. Also refer also to Carravaggio's painting *Narcissus* inserted below.

LOOKING AND THINKING	MAKING AND DOING
K-2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you see in this painting? What do you think the person is looking at? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write a list of other things or objects that have shiny and reflective surfaces.
3-6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look carefully at this painting and describe what you see. What do you think the person in the painting is doing or thinking? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paint or draw a picture of yourself reflected in a mirror or pond.
7-9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you think the person in the painting is doing or thinking? What clues does the artist give the audience as to what the painting may be about? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the Greco-Roman Myth about Narcissus. Research how this legend has inspired others painters, writers and film makers over time. Draw an image of your favourite or desired possession.
10-12 Cultural framework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss how this work plays on the historical and contemporary notions of desire and vanity culturally within society. Discuss how artists over time have looked to the past to reinterpret values and moral tales. Use Caravaggio's painting <i>Narcissus</i> as a starting point. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research the history of mirrors and the way artists over time have used reflections and mirrors symbolically in their artwork. Create a self portrait series of photographs of yourself in reflective surfaces.



Caravaggio b. 1571-d. 1610
Narcissus
1598-99
oil on canvas
110 x 92 cm
Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome





Ars Longa Vita Brevis 2009

oil on canvas

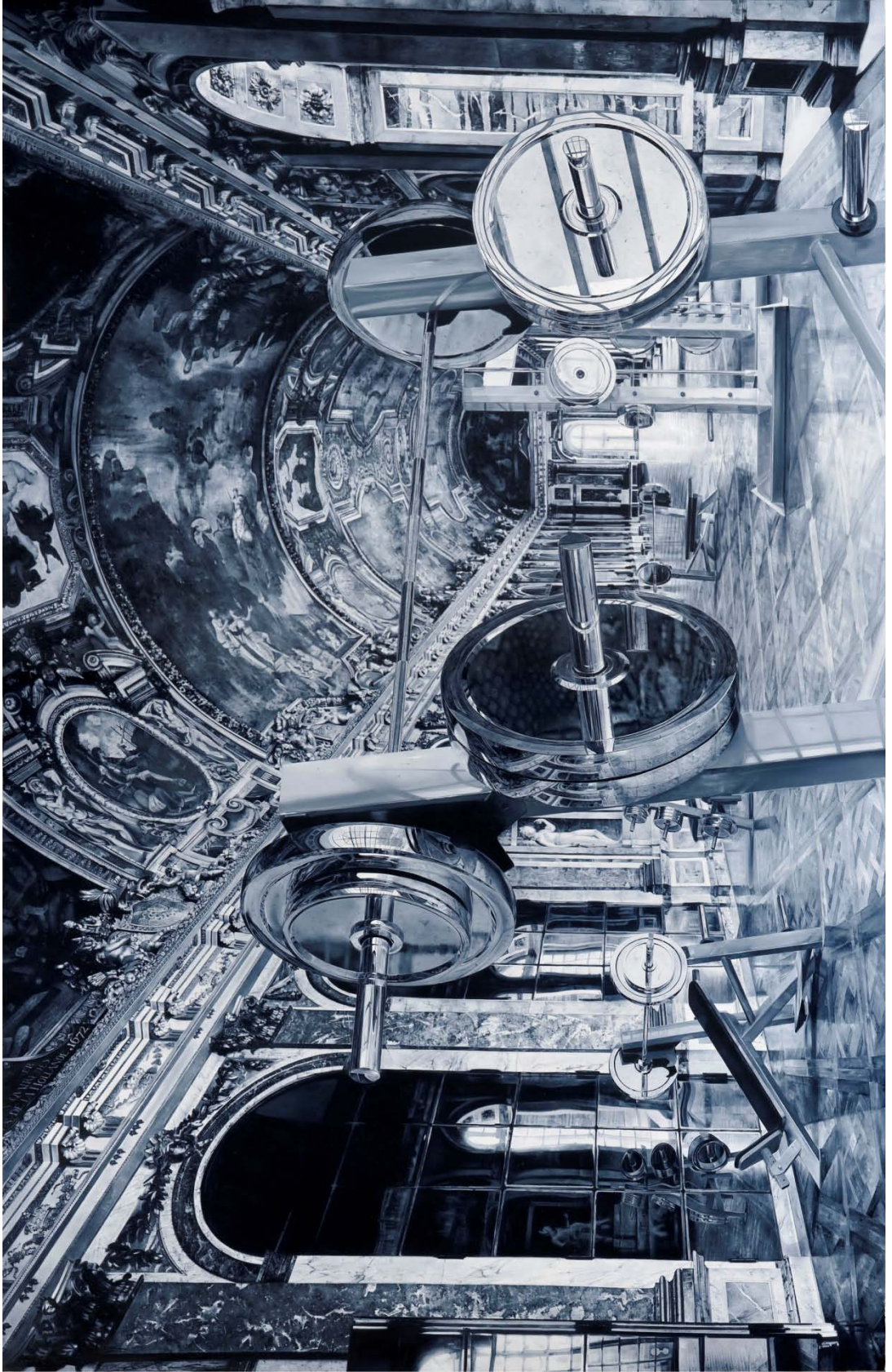
210 x 167cm

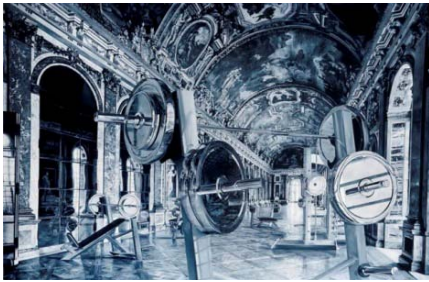
Collection of the artist

Hippocrates' wisdom that art is long, life is short, **Ars longa, vita brevis** is a profound truth. As a title for my self portrait it references a long tradition of **memento mori** painting in which material wealth would be displayed as part of a tableaux that would include a skull or a plate of decaying fruit, as a **metaphor** for mortality. In painting a self-portrait I wanted to move away from a literal representation of myself, and I was thinking about how contemporary society's attitude of conspicuous consumption encourages the consumer to see material things as the evocation of one's personality. This idea, that somehow the labels you wear should reflect your true essence is a triumph of marketing. It's like the Biblical invocation of a false God. All of the objects in the painting I possess, so I count myself a consumer. I am not immune to the lure of beautiful things: I covet these objects. The collective shape of the objects is intended to suggest a skull, (my own) and in that sense I am confronting my own mortality, questioning what might be my legacy. Will it be the things I left behind or that which I create or are they in fact the same thing? While it is a self-portrait I see it is an extension of my larger practice, which explores a kind of contemporary attitude of disaffection, or ennui. I know I will die but will I leave a good-looking corpse?

Michael Zavros

LOOKING AND THINKING	MAKING AND DOING
<p>K-2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look carefully at this painting and describe what you see? The artist has arranged the objects to make another picture. What is it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw or write a list of your favourite things that you own, or would like to own.
<p>3-6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michael Zavros has made a portrait of himself using objects that he either owns. Can the objects describe what type of person he is? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cut from magazines objects and things that you would like to own. Arrange and glue them down to create a face.
<p>7-9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Michael Zavros's artist statement he has referred to this work as a self portrait. Do you think objects, rather than a likeness of a person, can best describe their personality? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research other artists that have created portraits from objects. e.g. Tim Storrier and Arcimboldo. Create your own self portrait using collage material from magazines.
<p>10-12 Subjective framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How might different audiences respond to this painting? How has the use of symbols in this painting created an original yet emotional portrayal of the artist himself? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a list of significant objects or consumer goods that you own or covet that could best describe your interests, passions, hopes and desires. Compare this list with others in your class and discuss how these things create a narrative of contemporary culture.





Echo 2009
oil on canvas
210 x 320cm
Collection of Aaron and Melissa Giddings

Everything that was realized at **Versailles** was part of its undoing. The ceiling of the hall of mirrors features allegorical paintings that celebrate the exploits of the Sun King, the mirrors themselves are a sign of the conspicuous wealth of the King, mirrors being an expensive and covetable possession in the 17th Century. The hall is a testament to the hubris of the King. This work depicts the great **Hall of Mirrors** in Versailles bereft of people, still and silent occupied by mirror shiny chrome gym equipment. The hall of mirrors sets up infinite reflections; the mythical Narcissus may see himself reflected infinitely in the mirrors that line the walls and in the chrome of the gym equipment, the tools of his perfection and folly. In the ancient Roman myth of **Narcissus** the young Greek man is doomed to stare at his own reflection for spurning the advances of Echo. He is overcome by his own beauty and perishes. Narcissus's reflection is an endless **echo** of his own perfection across centuries; he is the lover and the loved. For Narcissus though, it is an unrequited love. Similarly, the empty Hall of Mirrors stands silent; vainly the viewer seeks a reflection, our own perhaps, in the mirrors.

Michael Zavros

LOOKING AND THINKING	MAKING AND DOING
K-2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look carefully at this painting. What can you see? What do you think the shiny surfaces are made from? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write a list of all the shiny surfaces you can think of.
3-6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look carefully at this painting and describe what you see. Do you think the objects in this room would normally found in this room? Where do you think this room may be? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the Greco-Roman Myth about Narcissus and Echo. Draw a picture of someone looking into a still pond. What do they see? Is it their reflection or what is under the water?
7-9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you notice about how Michael Zavros has used colour in this work and many of the other works in this exhibition? What colours do you imagine this room to be in real life? Discuss why you think he may have chosen to paint it with a limited palette. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find black and white images of reflective surfaces from magazines. Cut square sections and enlarge with a photocopier. Using graphite pencils to tonally render a series of these images to create abstract drawing or paintings.
10-12 Conceptual framework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How has Michael Zavros conceptually related a historically significant place with mythology and contemporary cultural issues? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An artist can manipulate colour to create mood, atmosphere and for aesthetic reasons. Do a drawing of an interior in one tone. Photocopy or scan the image and hand colour or print out the image using other variations of colour. Discuss how this effects what you see or feel.

GALLERY ACTIVITIES

TEACHER NOTES

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAIL

This Gallery activity is about finding the patterns from the Activity Sheet which are cropped detailed patterns from the artworks. Note: some paintings in the list are very small.

Details	Title of painting
1. Snake skin	<i>The Python</i>
2. Rooster tail feathers	<i>Black-Breasted Silver Onagadori Twins</i>
3. Feathers	<i>Blind</i>
4. Emily Kame Kngwarreye painting	<i>Body Lines</i>
5. Zebra Skin	<i>Body Lines</i>
6. Stripy shirt	<i>Debaser/Gaultier</i>
7. Reflections	<i>Echo</i>
8. Diamond facets	<i>Red Diamond/First you make your heart a stone</i>
9. Peacock feathers	<i>The Loved One</i>

REFLECTIONS

The students can use the image of the mirror to draw an imagined image of their reflected selves, or to draw a detail or small section of one of the paintings or sculptures in the exhibition.

Relate the activity to the exhibition works:

Disappear here 2011
etching on paper (ed.15)
14.6 x 16.4cm (image size)
Collection of the artist

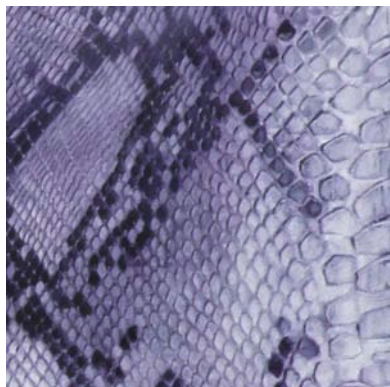
Orpheus 2009
bronze (ed. 18)
24.2.x13.7 x 1.4cm
Collection of the artist

GALLERY ACTIVITY

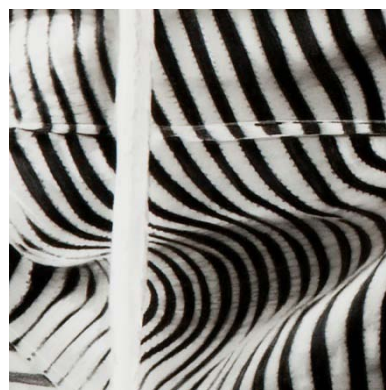
THE GLASS| MICHAEL ZAVROS

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAIL

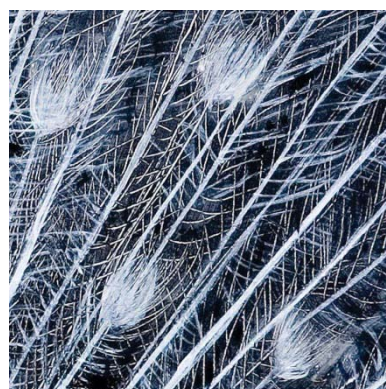
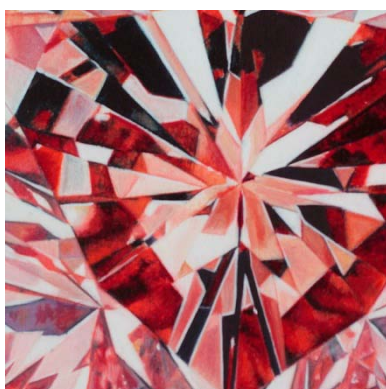
Find the following patterns in Michael Zavros' paintings.
When you find them, write down what the patterns are.



1.	2.	3.
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4.	5.	6.
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7.	8.	9.
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GALLERY ACTIVITY
THE GLASS| MICHAEL ZAVROS

Reflections

In the mirror, draw your reflected self or draw a detail or small section of one of the paintings or sculptures in the exhibition.



FURTHER ACTIVITIES

PRIMARY



We dance in the studio (to that s... on the radio) 2010
digital video on DVD
5 minutes
Collection of the artist

Dress ups

The young girl in the video is playing dress-ups and dancing to music playing on the radio while her father works in the background.

If you were to dress up, what would you wear?

Draw yourself in your favourite dress up costume. Get someone to take a photo of yourself posing in your disguise.

SECONDARY

Infinity Mirror Project (a mirror, within a mirror, within a mirror.....)

In the self portrait *The Glass (Madrid)*, Michael Zavros has captured himself reflected in two opposite mirrors



Set up two mirrors facing each other.
Create photographic self-portraits of yourself and/or your friends standing in front of your infinity mirror set up.

The Glass (Madrid) 2012
giclee print on cotton rag paper
100 x 66.72cm
Courtesy of the artist and Philip Bacon Galleries

CATALOGUE ESSAY

SURFACE IS EVERYTHING

Michael Zavros' paintings are **classical** visions of the contemporary world. From the details of high fashion, to the reenactments of **mythological narrative**, to images that represent the West's **imperial** past, to his wry sense of humour, Zavros' works revel in the surface of things. His images explore the nature of consumer objects, the incidental framing of shoes or clothes telling us of our cultural engagement with deep time - and to the ephemeral - while his domestic still lives reveal values and aspirations of absent inhabitants.

To say that Zavros' work is classical really means two things. First, his images are art historical in their sensibility and execution. Zavros' paintings and drawings are impeccable reproductions of his source material; to look upon his work is to be drawn into an **aesthetic** where the reproduction seems exact, truthful, and without unwarranted expressionist additions. While the trace of the artist's hand might be visible in these works, his aesthetic choices are continuous, engaging the viewer's attention to the subject rather than to the work's execution. In paintings such as *Tom Ford/ Black* [2011] and *Burberry Prorsum/Bay* [2006] the shock of recognition in the images rests on the technique; Zavros' talent for illustrative effect reinforces the surreal amalgamation of horse and fashion model, balancing just the right amount of drama with the calculated eye of observation. And, by imbuing a contemporary manifestation of beauty with the mythological aura of the **centaur**, Zavros deftly **conflates** the present and past in the manner of a classical painter.

Classical also means here that Zavros' work has an engagement with a profound sense of the material world, in terms of its appearance, but also in its implication. To understand the **context** of this vision we need to take a step back into the past. There was a time when the subject of a painting determined how important it was. Paintings of the real or imagined past – **historical narratives**, stories of the Bible, mythological subjects – these were at the top of a hierarchy of pictorial values that determined the worth of an artist's vision, while at the bottom were landscapes, paintings of animals, and still lives – subjects deemed comparatively too banal and quotidian for serious consideration. This hierarchy was based on the belief that painting had a morally educative role and, if it was to have a meaning beyond being merely decorative, then it should tackle the essential values of Western culture. More importantly, art was meant to be an ideal representation of the world, whereas art that merely described reality in illustrative terms was of little lasting consequence. Of course, these ideas were eroded and largely abandoned in the wake of **Modernism**, as artists turned away from the values of the academy to the reality of their everyday lives for inspiration. But oddly this hierarchy of value persists – perhaps not in contemporary art proper, but then certainly they underscore the values we collectively hold and valorise in Western society.

Zavros explores the meanings of this tradition throughout his work, from the earliest paintings included in this exhibition, to the most recent. *Tony Combs His Hair for Saturday Night* [1998] features the iconic face of John Travolta from *Saturday Night Fever* [1977]. He is caught mid-comb yet his eyes are fixed on the viewer, a glimpse of Al Pacino [as Serpico, from the film of the same name] just visible over his right shoulder. Just as Tony Manero [Travolta] idolised the style of Pacino, in part attempting to emulate him by hanging a movie poster of the actor on his bedroom wall, so too the image of Travolta evokes another layer of tribute. There is an infinite recession implied in Zavros' painting, each degree of separation from reality staged by the way the image is set up – a painting of a photograph – to infinity.

In the painting *V12 Narcissus* [2009], Zavros revisits this idea of layering, creating a self portrait as the character from Ancient Greek mythology, a figure drawn to his own reflection, then held there in love with his own beauty until he dies. In Zavros' image, the artist gazes at his reflection in the bonnet of a luxury car, embracing the body of the vehicle with his hands. This playful reenactment of the myth recalls the many treatments of this subject, from **Caravaggio's** version of 1599 to J.M. Waterhouse's 1903 confection. What is different about Zavros' version is that Narcissus is here pictured alone, whereas historically the image often

included **Echo**, the nymph who had been rejected by Narcissus and who, in various versions of the story, lured him to the water with the help of the goddess Nemesis. In Zavros' version the luxury car, a Mercedes, embodies both Echo – literally reflecting – and Nemesis, the **harbinger** of doom. Although Zavros' work has a deft humour, it also encapsulates a dread of the material object that ensnares the viewer in its superficial beauty, a glossy surface reflecting nothing but unrequited desire. Also painted in 2009 is *Echo*, a twin work perhaps to *V12 Narcissus*. In the image Zavros presents us with an image of highly polished bar bells and weightlifting benches placed in the vaulted Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles. The steel reflects the baroque surfaces but there are no figures here, just the possibility of a presence, the only signs of humanity visible are the tiny figures depicted in the wall and ceiling paintings. One might well imagine that, were we to enter this space, it would be filled with reflections, yet there is nothing really here but suggestion.

One of the notable aspects of Zavros' work is his use of colour. In many works the palette is monochromatic. This has two effects. One is the feeling of sumptuousness and glamour. In the oil painting *Secret men's business* [2000] the black and white image of expensive shoes striding toward the viewer has the aura of a men's fashion photo spread, or perhaps a TV ad that appropriates the look of the film *La Dolce Vita*. But the second effect is the distancing created between subject and treatment. This is an image of shoes, but one wholly created – artificial, styled and unnatural in every respect, from the “camera” angle of the image to its treatment. Zavros' irony here is the play between what is seen, and what we know. This is a moment without narrative context, an idea of something that is not quite there. Zavros uses this irony repeatedly, from *Skull (Horse)* [2010] with its skull and polished table, and *Body Lines* [2011] featuring the skins of tiger and zebra, to *Fontainebleau* [2009] and its throne room, and *Starck/Bawden/Zavros/Nell/Starck* [2008], a still life of art works arranged just so, [the title referring to the artists who made each object]. When colour does arrive it is explosive, such as the electric green that glowers over the pavilion in *Lime Spider* [2009] or the weird infrared spectra of *Love's Temple* [2006] and *Temple of Love* [2007]. None of the colour treatments in Zavros' work is naturalistic. These paintings and drawings have the feel of reproduction even when the artist might have created the source imagery himself. They retain the quality of their “look” – you gaze at these paintings and see that they might have come from fashion magazines, architecture journals, from snap shots and glossy reproductions in weekend supplements. The odd impersonality of the images are both soothing and eerie; soothing because they are like the untouched perfection of a five star hotel room, yet eerie because the absence of the **object** is utterly unreal.

The humour in Zavros' work is subtle and often hidden. Paintings such as *The Loved One* [2005] with its hypnotic peacock tail and *The Python* [2011], a still life featuring a python's skin – and a work by the American artist Richard Prince that famously appropriated a cigarette commercial for its image – contrast their style of humour. In *The Loved One* the image addresses the nature of attraction, the peacock's tail fanned in a gesture of display, whereas in *The Python*, what is absent again makes itself apparent, in this case the python itself, and in the picture hanging above, the author of the “original” image. The large quasi-portrait *Ars Longa Vita Brevis* [2009] is immediately recognisable as a face, done in the manner of painter **Giuseppe Arcimboldo**, but there is something else behind the joke. The Latin title roughly translates as “art is long, life is brief”, the artist admitting that what he leaves behind is perhaps more important than himself. This idea is touchingly addressed in the work *We Dance In The Studio [To That Shit on The Radio]* [2010] as Zavros' daughter Phoebe, in black ruffled skirt, sunglasses and Mickey Mouse ears, struts her stuff in the artist's studio as Zavros works quietly away in the background. It reminds us of another saying, one not in Latin, but just as memorable: we're not here for a long time, we're here for a good time.

Symbols of death and mortality appear and reappear throughout Zavros' work. The skulls, skins and memento mori are held in the **stasis** of an artwork, memorialising a moment in time, and of time passing, reminding us of some uncomfortable truths. The sculpture *Black Orchid – Paphiopedilum Vanitas* [2008] places the flower in the centre of a weight inscribed with the words "Olympic Body Building". The connection is straightforward – the body is built, only to be wasted by time. The orchid, popularly thought of as a symbol of death, stands as in the centre of the disc. Paphiopedilum translates as candor, or truth, while vanitas seems familiar as vanity but in fact means "emptiness". Although Zavros' work, in this sculpture and elsewhere, connects to the symbolic language of mortality, it also celebrates the beauty of the ephemeral and the fleeting, **ironised** as an object with an improbably long life, the delicate shape of the flower cast in bronze.

As much as we might believe that we live in the modern world with plenty of evidence of our **contemporaneity** to back it up - from technology to world events to the changing circumstances of the planet itself – that hierarchy of values that informs Western society play out at every level of our collective imagination. Value and worth are embodied in symbols that are centuries old, themes of life and death, of love, mortality, longing and loss, all timeless subjects of art. Zavros claims the language of art history as his means of bringing these ideas into contemporary painting. In *The Wanderer* [2011] Zavros references the work of German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich and his *Wanderer Above The Sea of Fog* [1818]. In Friedrich's painting the artist himself is seen atop a mountain peak gazing out over a shrouded valley to mountain peaks in the distance. Friedrich's painting invested intense emotional significance into the landscape, a symbolic rendering of the relationship between man, nature and god. In Zavros' picture, a wintry mountain landscape is seen layered with crisp snow and harsh sunlight. Drawn precisely in charcoal, Zavros' image is significantly different to Friedrich's – there is no figure here, no artist to be seen to be contemplating the majesty of nature, no heroic imagination beyond the picture itself. Zavros removes the figure and places the image before us for our own contemplation, equal to the artist in the sense we both see with his eyes. Like all of Zavros' work there is a sense of great time, of majesty and importance, but cool and beautiful and perhaps unattainable, except as an ideal. Zavros reminds us, the old symbols have meaning.

Andrew Frost
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Andrew Frost is an art critic, writer and broadcaster. His articles have been published in a wide variety of Australian and international art magazines and he is a regular contributor to *The Sydney Morning Herald*. In 2007 ABC1 screened the three-part series *The Art Life*, and a second series in 2009, which Frost wrote and presented. He is the author of the monograph *The Boys* [Currency Press] and is a PhD candidate at the College of Fine Arts, University of NSW.

GLOSSARY

Abject

1. Showing humiliation or submissiveness of the most contemptible kind
2. Most unfortunate or miserable
3. Showing utter resignation or hopelessness

Allegory

1. An expressive style that uses fictional characters and events to describe some subject by suggestive resemblances; an extended metaphor
2. A short moral story (often with animal characters)
3. A visible symbol representing an abstract idea

Ars longa, vita brevis

Ars longa, vita brevis is a Latin translation of a wise statement coming originally from Greek.

Centaur

Greek Mythology. One of a race of monsters having the head, trunk, and the arms of a man, and the body and legs of a horse.

Classical

1. Of or relating to ancient Greek or Latin literature, art, or culture
2. (Of art or architecture) Influenced by ancient Greek or Roman forms or principles

Conflate

1. To bring together; meld or fuse
2. To combine two into one whole

Contemporaneity

1. The quality of being current or of the present
2. Existing or occurring in the same period of time

Context

1. The circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed.
2. The parts of something written or spoken that immediately precede and follow a word or passage and clarify its meaning.

Culture

1. The tastes in art and manners that are favored by a social group
2. All the knowledge and values shared by a society
3. The attitudes and behaviour that are characteristic of a particular social group or organisation
4. A particular society at a particular time and place
5. A highly developed state of perfection; having a flawless or impeccable quality

Debaser

A person who lowers the quality, character, or value; degrade.

Echo

1. A repetition of sound, produced by the sound waves reflecting from an obstructing surface
2. Any repletion or close imitation
3. Greco-Roman Mythology. Name of a Mountain Nymph who pined away for love of the beautiful youth Narcissus until only her voice remained

Ephemeral

1. Lasting for a markedly brief time
2. Living or lasting only for a day, as certain plants or insects do

Fontainebleau

The **Palace of Fontainebleau**, is located 55 kilometres from the centre of Paris, and is one of the largest French royal châteaux. The palace as it is today is the work of many French monarchs, building on an early 16th century structure of Francis I. The building is arranged around a series of courtyards. The city of Fontainebleau has grown up around the remainder of the Forest of Fontainebleau, a former royal hunting park. This forest is now home to many endangered species of Europe.

Construction of the Royal Palace of Fontainebleau began in 1528 in the Fontainebleau Forest to be used as a royal hunting ground for King Henri II and Catherine de Medici.

Later, the Gallery of King Francois I, with its frescoes framed in stucco between 1522 and 1540, was the first great decorated gallery built in France. Known as the "Fontainebleau style" of interior decoration, it combined sculpture, metalwork, painting, stucco and woodwork. King Henri IV had a 1200m canal built in the park (which can be fished today), and ordered the planting of pines, elms and fruit trees. Three hundred years later the chateau had fallen into disrepair and during the French Revolution many of the original furnishings were stolen. At the beginning of the 1800s, Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte transformed the Chateau de Fontainebleau into a symbol of his grandeur, with modifications of the chateau's structure, including the cobblestone entrance wide enough for his carriage.

Hall of Mirrors

The Hall of Mirrors is the central gallery of the Palace of Versailles and is renowned as being one of the most famous rooms in the world. The Hall of Mirrors is the principal and most remarkable feature of King Louis XIV of France's third building campaign of the Palace of Versailles (1678–1684). Construction of the Hall of Mirrors began in 1678.

Harbinger

1. A person or thing that announces or signals the approach of another
2. A forerunner of something

Historical narratives

A historical narrative tells a story that is set in the past. That setting is usually real and drawn from history, and often contains actual historical persons or places, but the main characters tend to be fictional.

Hyperrealism

Is a more contemporary genre of painting and sculpture resembling a high-resolution photograph. Hyperrealist painters and sculptors use photographic images as a reference source from which to create a more definitive and detailed rendering. Though based on the aesthetics of Photorealism, it more often depicts a more emotive narrative.

Imperial

Imperial is a term that is used to describe something that relates to an Empire, Emperor, or the concept of Imperialism. Imperialism is the political theory of the acquisition and maintenance of empires. The term is used to describe the policy of a country in maintaining colonies and dominance over distant lands, regardless of whether the country calls itself an empire.

Ironise

To use irony or be ironic.

Isomorphism

Similarity in form, as in organisms of different ancestry.(Biology).

Memento mori

A reminder of your mortality.

Metaphor

1. Figure of speech in which an expression is used to refer to something that it does not literally denote in order to suggest a similarity
2. One thing conceived as representing another; a symbol.

Modernism

Painting, sculpture, architecture, and graphic arts characteristic of the 20th century and of the later part of the 19th century. Modern art embraces a wide variety of movements, theories, and attitudes whose modernism resides particularly in a tendency to reject traditional, historical, or academic forms and conventions in an effort to create an art more in keeping with changed social, economic, and intellectual conditions.

Mythology

A body of myths, as that of a particular people, or that relating to a particular person *that* addresses their origin, history, deities, ancestors, and heroes.

Narrative art

Is art that tells a story, either as a moment in an ongoing story or as a sequence of events unfolding over time. In narrative art, the artist chooses how to portray the story, represent the space, and how to shape time within the artwork.

Narcissus

Greco-Roman Myth where a beautiful youth fell in love with his own reflection in a still pool of water, not knowing that it was his own reflection he pined away and died. Also refers to a flower that is supposed to have sprung from the spot where he died.

Stasis

A period or state of inactivity or balance.

Valorise

1. To establish and maintain the price of (a commodity) by governmental action
2. To give or assign a value to

Versailles

The Palace of Versailles, or simply Versailles, is a royal château in Versailles in the Île-de-France region of France. In French it is the Château de Versailles. When the château was built, Versailles was a country village; today, however, it is a suburb of Paris, some 20 kilometres southwest of the French capital. The court of Versailles was the centre of political power in France from 1682, when Louis XIV moved from Paris, until the royal family was forced to return to the capital in October 1789 after the beginning of the French Revolution. Versailles is therefore famous not only as a building, but as a symbol of the system of absolute monarchy of the Ancient Régime.

ARTISTS THAT ARE REFERENCED IN ARTWORK OR CATALOGUE ESSAY

Arcimboldo Giuseppe (b. 1527 d.1593) was an Italian painter best known for creating imaginative portrait heads made entirely of such objects as fruits, vegetables, flowers, fish, and books. He painted representations of these objects on the canvas arranged in such a way that the whole collection of objects formed a recognisable likeness of the portrait subject.

Bawden Lionel (b. 1974) is an Australian artist working in sculpture, performance, installation and painting. Bawden's core practice exploits hexagonal coloured pencils as a sculptural material, reconfigured and carved into amorphous shapes, mining the material's rich qualities of colour, geometry and metaphor.

Caravaggio Michelangelo Merisi da (b.1573 d. 1610)

Italian painter noted for his realistic depiction of religious subjects and his novel use of light.

Ngwarreye Emily Kame (b.1910 d. 1996) was an Australian Aboriginal artist from the Utopia community in the Northern Territory. She is one of the most prominent and successful artists in the history of contemporary Indigenous Australian art.

Nell (b. 1975) Nell is an Australian mixed media/sculptor/installation artist. She is represented by Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

Prince Richard (b. 1949, in the Panama Canal Zone now Panama) is an American painter and photographer. Prince began appropriating photographs in 1975. His image, *Untitled (Cowboy)*, a "rephotograph" of a photograph taken originally by Sam Abell and appropriated from a cigarette advertisement, was the first "rephotograph" to raise more than \$1 million at auction when it was sold at Christie's New York in 2005.

Starck Philippe Patrick (b.1949 Paris) is a French product designer and probably the best known designer in the New Design style. His designs range from interior designs to mass-produced consumer goods such as toothbrushes, chairs, and even houses. He was educated in Paris at the École Camondo and in 1968, he founded his first design firm, which specialised in inflatable objects. In 1969, he became art director of his firm along with Pierre Cardin.

FURTHER READING

Michael Zavros: *Charm Offensive*, Robert Leonard, *Art in Australia*, On Beauty, Volume 49 #1 2011

***The Good Son*, Michael Zavros, YouTube.** An oblique video portrait of Artist Michael Zavros as he prepares for an exhibition of fine drawings to be shown in his incongruously gaudy home town of The Gold Coast.

Obsessed with Beauty // Michael Zavros talks to Yatzer Published in: *Fashion, Interviews* by Tina Komninou, 15 March 2010.

Slow Art: recent fictions by Michael Zavros, Louise Martin-Chew, *Art Monthly*; issue 233, September 2010.

WEB LINKS

<http://www.michaelzavros.com/>

<http://www.yatzer.com/Obsessed-with-Beauty--Michael-Zavros-talks-to-Yatzer>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nl9MgQ5aBuU>

Michael Zavros is represented by Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane and Sophie Gannon Gallery, Melbourne

