



Howard Arkley, *Interventions and Doodles: Mills & Boon Books*. Clockwise from top left, from: *Vol.8: The smoke and the fire*, p.31; *Vol.2: First the doctor*, p.55; *Vol.4: Glorious haven*, p.81; *Vol.1: The chateau of fire*, p.129. © The Estate of Howard Arkley, Courtesy Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art. Howard Arkley Archive, Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 14217

Howard Arkley Archive

Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 14217

Acquired 2011-13

Howard Arkley (1951–99) is acknowledged as one of the most important of Australia’s contemporary artists. His work is held by many major art galleries and widely exhibited. Born in Melbourne, Arkley studied art at Prahran College of Advanced Education. He achieved fame and acclaim for his large fluorescent paintings of suburban houses and interiors made from the late 1980s to mid-1990s. In 1999, he was appointed Australia’s representative to the 48th Venice Biennale, in Italy, where he exhibited *The Home Show* at the Australian Pavilion. Soon after his return to Melbourne, following great success overseas, he died of a heroin overdose.

The Howard Arkley archive, acquired partly through purchase with the support of the State Library Victoria Foundation and partly through donation from the Arkley Estate, consists of more than 1600 individual works on paper – drawings, doodles, sketches, watercolours, and working drawings for large paintings – and more than 400 photographs. The 33 sketchbooks and 48 visual diaries give insights into Arkley’s planning processes, influences and reading.

What is rare and extraordinary about this collection, an almost exclusively visual archive, is its scope and size: it is a rare near-complete studio archive representing almost 30 years of an artist’s work, dating from his student years in the 1970s until his death in 1999.

Howard Arkley was the quintessential Australian artist of the Pop/postmodern generation of the 1970s and 80s.¹ He was fascinated by popular culture – comics, toys, disco and punk music, advertising imagery and neon signs – and quoted and appropriated from it in his art.

Among the many items in the archive are ten vintage Mills & Boon romantic novels, discarded by the Prahran Mechanic’s Institute, into which Arkley has doodled, drawn and pasted images. These ‘interventions’ were made between 1984 and 1988, at a time when Arkley was moving away from abstract and pattern-dominated paintings towards more figurative work.²

While the doodles and drawings are original and immediate, what’s appropriated here is the vehicle: the printed page. The pulse and rhythm of the printed words, lines and paragraphs combine with the energy of the doodles to create edgy, irreverent pieces. These works are essentially comical. Here, pulp fiction meets postpunk doodles and graffiti; it’s the type of comedy evident when high and low art meet. The ten volumes are fully digitised and can be explored online via the Library’s catalogue.