

# CUT WITH THE KITCHEN KNIFE

A NETS VICTORIA  
TOURING EXHIBITION  
CURATED BY  
EMILY JONES

## **Education Resource**

Written by Kate Stones

**NETS**  
VICTORIA

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## About this Education Resource

This education resource is intended for use as a starting point to generate discussion and activities before, during and after a visit to *Cut with the kitchen knife*. It is designed to be used in conjunction with information provided in the exhibition catalogue, gallery wall texts and on the NETS Victoria website. The resource includes an introduction to the exhibition, definitions of key terms, artist profiles, suggested points for discussion, activities for students, and references for further research. Teachers may select relevant aspects of this resource to tailor their own response sheet for use in the exhibition.

**Please note:** this education resource includes drug references in relation to the work of Stuart Ringholt, so it is very important that you assess the information as to its suitability for your students. Ringholt's work in the exhibition does not overtly reference drug use in any way, however it is an important aspect of his biographical information, which is relevant to a discussion of the Personal Framework in the VCE Art Curriculum.

### Planning your visit

Before visiting *Cut with the kitchen knife* it is suggested that you contact gallery staff to determine the following.

- Opening hours, transport and parking options, cloakroom facilities and admission fees
- Suitability of content for the year level you intend to bring
- Staff availability for introductory talks and tours
- Education and Public Programs, artist talks etc. that coincide with the exhibition

Before your visit you may wish to discuss the following with your students:

- An introduction and background to the history of collage in art (see this resource – A Brief History of Collage)
- Your expectations for appropriate behaviour at a gallery, in regards to the safety of both students and artworks, and given that a gallery is a public space

### Curriculum links and themes

Use this list to generate ideas, activities and points for discussion, and where possible contact your local gallery for other ideas and suggestions. This document is designed to be used by students at VELS levels 5 and 6, and VCE Units 1-4, however the material may be easily tailored to suit younger students.

#### Visual/Creative/Studio Arts

- Artist's practice, ideas and inspiration
- Responding to Artworks: formal analysis and interpreting meanings and messages
- Exploring artists personal and cultural perspectives
- Exploring symbols and metaphors expressed in artworks
- Exploring possibilities for materials, processes and techniques

#### Visual Communication and Design

- Understanding principles of design such as balance, form, scale, focal point
- Overall exhibition design – interior exhibition design and graphics that reflect a consistent theme and create a specific ambiance
- Influence of art on graphics and vice versa
- The impact of print technology on visual art practice

#### Media Studies

- Cross-pollination between art, film, advertising and popular culture

## Introduction

*Cut with the kitchen knife* presents collage works from the last twenty years by contemporary artists at a range of points in their careers. The title refers to an iconic collage work by Dada artist **Hannah Hoch**, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (1919-1920). Dada artists believed that art should engage with the modern world. Hoch's work is a photomontage, a teaming array of text and images, apparently chaotic, including images of the new modern era: technology, text, images of women, crowds of people, politicians, thinkers, and a self-portrait. Hoch was part of the Berlin Dada group and she belonged to a new generation of professional women who emerged during the Weimar era who were financially independent and liberated from the domestic roles that had been traditionally assigned to women. Her work explored the rapidly changing roles and identities of women in the 1920s.



Collage is defined by the action of physical cutting and pasting, a term that has now been re-defined for the digital age. This action of cutting and pasting is an act of destruction of the old and the re-construction of the new. For this reason collage presents itself as the perfect tool to question the established order of the world; the cultural assumptions that we make about life, women, different races, consumer choices, and political systems.

The artists featured in *Cut with the kitchen knife* use collected materials to reorder the physical world as a way of interacting with it and shaping it. Obsessive collecting and repetition are key elements; most of the artists who have ever used collage are obsessive hoarders. Each artist restructures the contemporary chaos of information through their own unique perspective; be it through Elizabeth Gower's obsessive hoardings of catalogues and reconfiguring them into intricate geometric patterns to Christian Capurro's erasure of magazine images, or Heather Shimmen's intricate suspended **Rorschach** forms.

**Please note:** due to copyright reasons, we are unable to reproduce Hannah Hoch's *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* in this publication. To view the work, please visit:

<http://arthistory.about.com/od/dada/ig/Dada-at-MoMA---Berlin/Cut-with-the-Kitchen-Knife.htm>

### Above:

Christian Capurro, *grafting #1*, 1996 - 1997

removable sticky tape, ink, paper

14.6 x 10.9 cm

Courtesy the artist, Milani Gallery, Brisbane and Breenspace, Sydney.

Photography by Christian Capurro



## A Brief History of Collage

The term Collage originates from the French word 'colle' meaning to paste. Collage is one of the most important techniques in the development of art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It began a long process of questioning what *defines* an artwork, and what **representation** really means. The development of collage is strongly linked to the increasing mechanisation of the printing industry, as most of the images that artists have used to make collages are printed images. They are 'throw away' images because they are printed in large numbers, and so are not considered precious.

**Pablo Picasso** was the first artist to incorporate collage into his paintings in 1908. Picasso and his friend and colleague, **Georges Braque** together created the art movement called **CUBISM**. They looked for ways to break up a traditional image of an object, a still life for example, to challenge how we think about 'seeing'. Picasso used text cut from newspapers, wallpaper and objects nailed to his canvases to experiment with composition, challenging traditional ways of representing objects.

**DADA** artists embraced collage as the perfect technique to express their dissatisfaction with the existing social order. The Dada movement developed during and after World War 1 (from about 1916 – the early 1920s). The trauma caused by this war (known as 'The Great War'), the amount of men who died, and the suffering and poverty that resulted, especially in Germany, forced artists to think about values and meaning in new ways. Dada artists used found objects and images to make art works. They combined them in improvised and spontaneous ways. Dada artists wanted to create 'anti-art': art that seemed meaningless, that used everyday objects. They questioned the definition of art itself, they questioned the idea of artistic skill and its value, they wanted to destroy the distinctions between 'high' and 'low' art. They questioned the art market and the values of the middle classes, or the '*bourgeoisie*'. Dada artists used a lot of text in their collages, and everyday items such as bus tickets. Dada artists that made collage included Raoul Hausmann, Kurt Schwitters and **Hannah Hoch**. Dada artists used collage to criticise the 'status quo' – the establishment.

**SURREALISM** evolved out of Dada. Surrealist artists also combined images to create new forms. They did this through painting (Salvador Dalí and René Magritte) and also through collage. The Surrealist artist most famous for his collages is **Max Ernst**. Surrealists were not so interested in politics and values – they were influenced by Sigmund Freud and his work on the 'unconscious'; they used collage, like dreams, to expose unconscious desires.

During the social changes and increased consumerism of the 1960s artists were influenced by Dada art, artworks from this era are sometimes referred to as **Neo-Dada**. **POP** art was one of the most important movements of this era. Pop artists used collage techniques to criticise consumer culture and the cult of celebrity. Probably the most famous Pop artist is Andy Warhol. He began his career as an illustrator in the advertising industry. Pop artists **Richard Hamilton** and **Robert Rauschenberg** specialised in collage.

### Discussion Points:

How do you think collage-making of the past has influenced today's culture (visual art/graphic design/advertising/music/writing...)?

### What is Collage about?

- Collage is about breaking up (or literally cutting up) old worlds and creating new ones
- Collage is about IMPERMANENCE and IMPROVISATION
- Collage is about FINDING, GATHERING, COLLECTING and RECYCLING
- Collage is about using images that are specific to a particular moment in time (newspapers and advertising images)
- Collages are like dreams – they are made up of fragments of information that can be strung together to create meaning
- Collage can be surprising, beautiful, intriguing and sometimes shocking or even horrifying

## Key Terms

**Cubism** is an art movement that developed during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century principally by Pablo Picasso and George Braque. They experimented with representation by breaking up images into geometric planes. Although still broadly representational, their paintings showed multiple views of an object, giving a fractured appearance.

**Dada** is an art movement that began around 1916 and ended in the early 1920s. Dada artists championed collage as a technique which helped them to question established values about art, about ideas of skill, originality, economic value and the meaning and function of art in society.

**Modernism** refers to the vibrant period in cultural history from around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to around 1970. During this era, artists questioned established values about art – its function in society and in the economy. Modernism was characterised by emphasis on originality, individuality, and a search for a singular truth about art.

**Neo-Dada** is a term that applies to art that has similarities in method or intent to earlier Dada artwork. It is the foundation of Fluxus and Pop Art. Neo-Dada is characterised by its use of modern materials, popular imagery, and absurdist contrast. It also patently denies traditional concepts of aesthetics. Neo-Dada Artists to explore: Yves Klein, George Maciunas, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Joseph Beuys, Ushio Shinohara and Robert Rauschenberg.

**Photomontage** refers to collage that only uses found photographic imagery. In a broader sense 'collage' can use any kind of image (for example text, tickets), or even objects attached to the surface of the work.

**Pop Art** is an art movement from the late 50s and 60s which corresponded with the end of World War II, a boom in consumer confidence in America, and the rise of the advertising industry. Pop Art utilised similar strategies and techniques to Dada artists – particularly collage.

**Representation** in art refers to an image that depicts something recognisable as an object, person, landscape or interior. Representational art seeks to depict the physical appearance of reality. During the Modernist era, artists questioned the value and meaning of representation in art, experimenting with abstraction and expressionism.

The **Rorschach** test is a psychological test in which subjects are asked to look at symmetrical ink blots created by putting ink on a page and pressing it together. The subject is asked to describe what the image reminds them of. This information is used by psychologists to examine personality and emotional state. The test is named after its creator, Swiss psychologist Hermann Rorschach.

**Surrealism** evolved from Dada, but rather than pursuing active political engagement, Surrealist artists sought to uncover the secrets of unconscious desires and drives. They were heavily influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud.

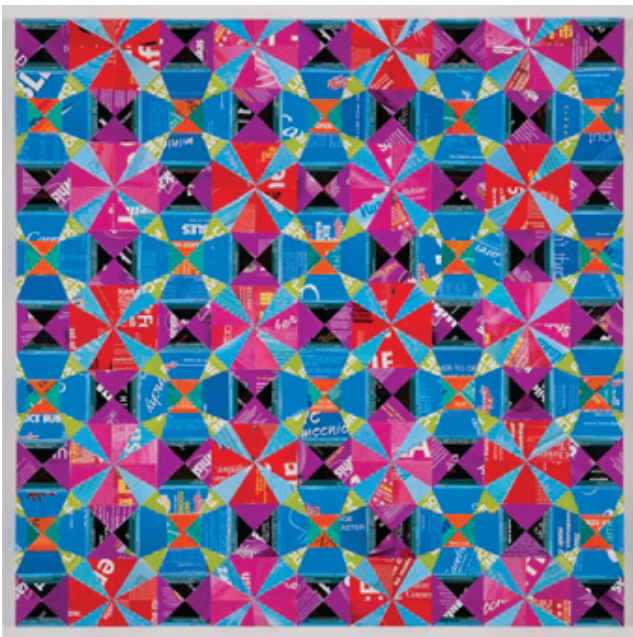
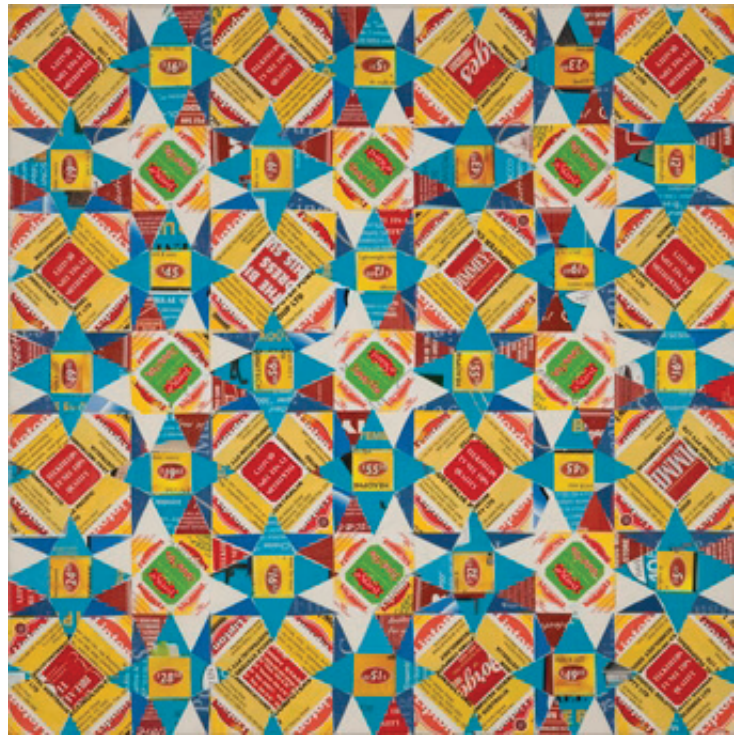
**The Weimar Republic** emerged in Germany in 1918 after World War I. A National Assembly convened in the city of Weimar where a new constitution for the German Reich was written. The Weimar Republic was a period of liberal democracy, which gave way to the rise of the Nazi Party in the early 1930s. The period was characterised by economic boom and bust cycles, political extremism and the flowering of German art, music, cinema and science.

## Selected Artist Profiles and Works

### Elizabeth Gower

Elizabeth Gower has been exhibiting since the late 1970s. She teaches in the Painting Department of the Victorian College of the Arts, and in her early career she was a painter, making works which were of abstracted and silhouetted found images. In an interview with Megan Backhouse in 2004 (*The Age*, 20 Nov 2004) she said: "For a time I flipped between painting and collage and finally I started to use only the found images...Every now and then I think of what I could do with paint, but I have an extensive collection of found imagery that I need to edit or cut up. Although the process of cutting and pasting is time-consuming, I don't think it's much different from a painter who spends hours rendering something to get it right. It's the same kind of obsession."

She sources her found images from discarded papers sourced directly from the domestic and local environment: the familiar, everyday detritus, such as junk mail that arrives in her letterbox, food packaging, newspapers, and billboards. The common theme in the images that Gower collects is that they represent transitory objects of desire that change all the time; icons and events from daily life as well as geographic situations and specific cultural moments in time. These are the kinds of images that flutter before our eyes all the time in daily life, they are always changing, but the never very much. These slight and constant changes create a kind of pulse, a rhythm which perhaps can lull us into a kind of cultural stupor.



Gower has a family, and the methods she uses in her work have evolved around being a busy mother. She carefully cuts up her intricate images whilst watching TV, picking up her scissors in the same way someone might pick up their knitting. She says, "I have often wondered whether my art process innately suited a fragmented lifestyle or whether it became fragmented because of the lifestyle. I'm not really sure which came first."

Gower arranges her found images based on mathematical systems, focusing on devising patterns, rather than creating representational images. So in some ways she is creating snapshots from a kaleidoscope world of consumerism. She deals with the speed of our shifting desires, how quickly objects date, the speed of consumerism, the allure of advertising brochures and the globalisation of all manner of commodities.

"The images of products I use, such as cars, shoes, washing machines, are generic rather than specific brands. They become symbols of affluent 21<sup>st</sup> century living and mass production. I'm representing the clutter, the information-overload, making sense of it, but also being seduced by it."



## Creating and Making

- In small groups, discuss the sort of objects that are currently 'objects of desire' – consumer goods that have become fashionable.
- Start a collection of images of the same object.
- Create a collage influenced by Elizabeth Gower's work. Plan and create a regular, underlying pattern for your artwork.

## Exploring and Responding

- At the exhibition compare Elizabeth Gower's work *Savings 11* (2010) with *Between the lines* (2011) by Mandy Gunn. Draw a Venn diagram and make notes inside it to illustrate how the works are similar and different.
- Discuss how Elizabeth Gower has used pattern in her work in the exhibition. What shapes can you identify in the works you can see?
- Describe how Elizabeth Gower uses colour in her artworks. What is the colour like? Bold? Subtle? Warm? Cool? Is colour an important element? What effect does it have on the artwork?



## VCE Art/Studio Art

- Discuss how Elizabeth Gower's techniques have been influenced by her personal circumstances.
- What historical art movements do you think have influenced and inspired her work OTHER than Dada? What techniques and materials have been used by these artists?
- How does the use of collage change the meanings and messages in Elizabeth Gower's work?
- What are the most important art elements in Elizabeth Gower's work?

### Above:

Elizabeth Gower, *Savings 13*, 2010

paper cuttings on canvas

30 x 30 cm

Courtesy the artist, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

### Previous page, top:

Elizabeth Gower, *Savings 11*, 2010

paper cuttings on canvas

45 x 45 cm

Courtesy the artist, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

### Previous page, bottom:

Elizabeth Gower, *Savings 12*, 2010

paper cuttings on canvas

80 x 80 cm

Courtesy the artist, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.



## Deborah Kelly

Deborah Kelly is from Melbourne, but lives in Sydney. Her work is strongly political - she tackles issues based on gender, sexuality, race, nationality and history. Collage is only one of the many techniques or strategies that she uses to convey her ideas. She has projected images onto the night sky over Sydney and Singapore; she has posted images onto tram stops and bus shelters, and published café postcards. She also uses 'tactical media' – a grass roots movement using the internet and digital technology for social activism.

Kelly is a founding member of the art gang 'boat-people.org', which has been making public work dealing with race, nations, borders and history since 2001. Their first act was a daring, unauthorised projection of a 15-metre high, tall ship image, captioned "Boat People", on to the Sydney Opera House one night, inspired by an Aboriginal woman telling Kelly that all non-indigenous Australians were effectively "boat people". Kelly is clear that boat-people.org are not trying to speak on behalf of refugees. Boat-people.org are exploring the origin of hatred of refugees, and trying to break down the divisions between existing residents of Australia and people who came here to fleeing from war, natural disasters and corrupt political regimes.

Kelly's works in *Cut with the kitchen knife* are handmade collages in the tradition of Hannah Hoch. *Incomplete notes from timespace tourism* (2011) uses images from ghostly 1970s Croatian girly magazines that Kelly has barnacled with jewels and ocean creatures. Through these works the artist analyses and re-shapes the depiction of the female image in the mass media. She creates a new world of fantastical females whilst satirising current preoccupations with beauty.



Deborah Kelly talks about her work in *Cut with the kitchen knife*:

"I come carrying bling, and pictures of bling, and actual relative riches to the impenetrable grey of this crumbling city. The ghosts of broken utopias and war with the cousins jostle me everywhere, urgently talking and gesticulating and tugging my earlobes. I can't understand a thing they say nor interpret their anxious gestures. The dense smog of all I do not know is in my mouth and in my eyes. In white days under zero, I wander aimlessly through flea markets so bleak they seem to be selling actual fleas. A very old woman flogs socialist-era girly magazines, and I can't put them down, and at once I'm so confounded, I can hardly pick them up, either. All I can do is perform my own strangeness in relation to them, my awkward well-meaning feminist self, a time-traveller from the future, bearing inappropriate gifts."



## Creating and Making

- Discuss issues that are currently in the news, nationally or perhaps specific to your geographical area e.g. the treatment of animals, homophobia or environmental issues. Select an issue in contemporary life that you feel strongly about.
- Collect images that represent your feelings about that issue. They could be from newspapers and magazines talking directly about that issue, or they could be unrelated images that express your feelings about your issue.
- Make a collage work from your collected images. Try different compositions before you decide on the best way to arrange your images.
- Think of other ways that you could communicate your message to your audience. Could you create fliers or postcards? Could you create a blog? Consider who your audience is, and what technique would best communicate to them.

## Exploring and Responding

- Research political art works from different times in history. How do they compare to the work of politically motivated artists today (like Deborah Kelly)? How do their techniques differ?
- At the exhibition discuss how Deborah Kelly has used colour and tone in her work? How does this affect the mood and message in the artwork?

## VCE Art/Studio Art

- Before or after visiting *Cut with the kitchen knife*, research the collage work of Kenyan-born artist Wangechi Mutu and Hannah Hoch. Select a work by each artist and make a comparison between the two. Describe the varying cultural background of each artist.
- At *Cut with the kitchen knife* discuss the differences and similarities with works by Mutu and Hoch and with *Incomplete notes from timespace tourism (1 – 6)* (2011) by Deborah Kelly.
- Research other artists tackling issues to do with treatment and attitudes to refugees.
- Kelly's previous work has been focused on issues of feminism and nationalism. Discuss how you think that *Incomplete notes from timespace tourism (1 – 6)* relates to this theme.
- Research the activities of the art collective The Guerrilla Girls ([www.guerrillagirls.com](http://www.guerrillagirls.com)). Compare their techniques and activities to those of Deborah Kelly.



### Images above and previous page:

Deborah Kelly, *Incomplete notes from timespace tourism (1 – 6)*, 2011  
collage on pigment ink digital reproductions from Magazin 12 August 1971 Yugoslavia  
45 x 60 cm  
Courtesy the artist and Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Sydney.  
Photography by Ivan Kuharić

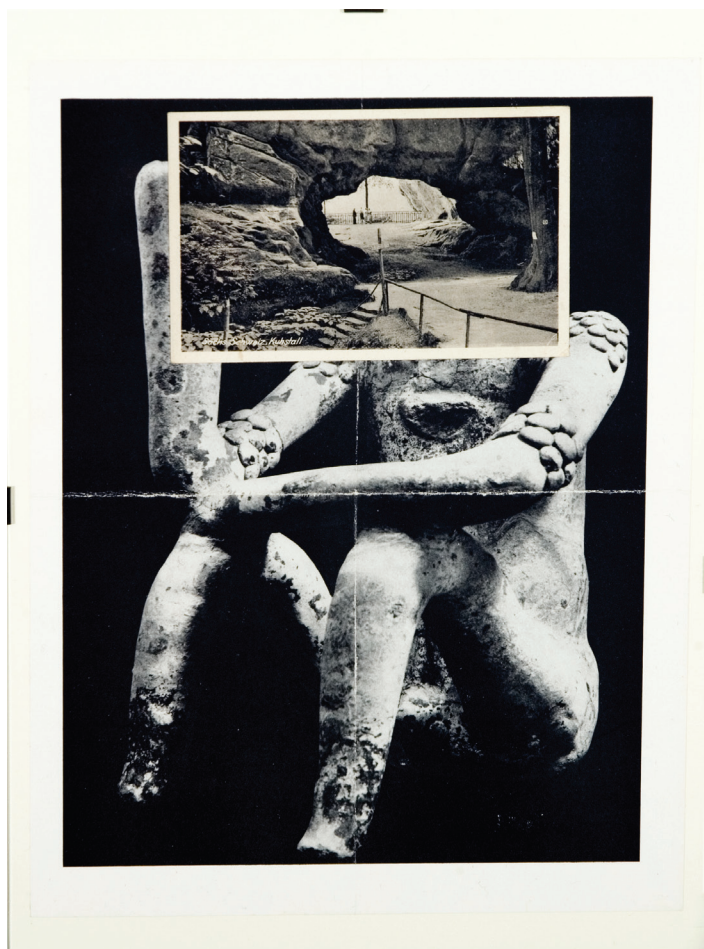


## Nicholas Mangan

Nicholas Mangan was born in Geelong in 1979 and currently lives and works in Melbourne. He completed fine art studies at the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, in 1999, followed by a two year studio residency at Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne. He has exhibited widely in Australian and internationally. In 2006 Nicholas undertook a New York Studio Residency, funded by the Australia Council for the Arts. In 2007 he was a recipient of the Anne and Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship, resulting in studies at Universität der Künste in Berlin, Germany.



Mangan's work seeks to blur the boundaries between the natural and the manufactured, the organic and the synthetic, and he goes on to extrapolate the political implications of this relationship. He studied drawing, and his professional practice began mainly as a sculptural one, although he has always made drawings and collages. In 2012 he incorporated a short video into an exhibition that looked at the environmental and financial degradation in the Republic of Nauru, the world's smallest island nation famous for its phosphate rock deposits.



Mangan incorporates forms and images from a variety of cultures into his work – some from contemporary Western culture, and others from various indigenous cultures. He takes these forms and applies natural processes to them, so highlighting the similarity in the way that both natural and cultural systems behave. A vivid example of this approach can be seen in his 2004 work, *Untitled (nest)*, exhibited at Sutton Gallery in Melbourne. Here a metal ladder fuses with a wooden version of itself, which then morphs into a honeycombed, dripping carved form that resembles an insect's nest. A wasp or termite colony has reconstituted the ladder as a home or source of food.

Mangan expresses ethical and moral concerns for the way in which a culture is interpreted for tourism. He states, "I'm just dealing with notions of Australia, it is political, but not an aggressive statement... once nature enters the economy, it becomes political. I look at the way banksias are being portrayed in tourist's shops and it bothers me."

The geological and archaeological imagery found in *Flohetrauling* (2008) contain fragments from magazines the artist found in Berlin flea markets. With gentle humour, the works recognise similarities of form and pattern existing across natural and cultural forms. The images resemble strange encyclopedia entries, but layered and partly peeled back they appear both timeless and historic, questioning and witty.

### Creating and Making

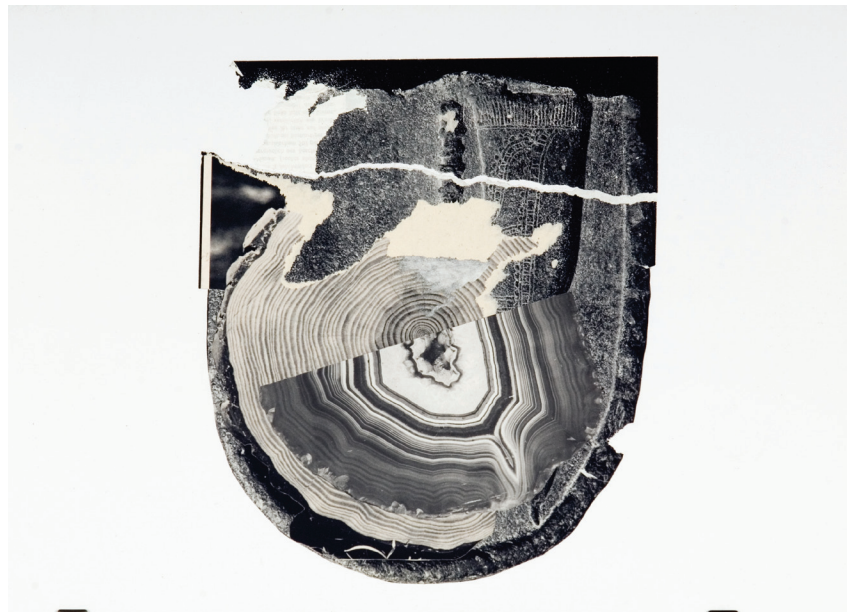
- Think about and discuss how different patterns and forms are found repeated in different aspects of the natural world, and in human-made forms like architecture or product design.
- Select two found images, that are formally similar; one of the natural world, and one of the manufactured world, and note down in point form what meanings you can derive from the connection between the two.
- Collect some more images based on your initial notes and create a series of simple collages that explore your theme further.

### Exploring and Responding

- At the exhibition discuss which art elements are most important in *Flohetrauling* (2008)?
- Which art elements help to connect the different images that Mangan uses to create his collage works?

### VCE Art/Studio Art

- Nicholas Mangan has travelled extensively in his career. He has had a studio residency in New York, studied in Berlin, and visited a remote community in the Northern Territory. He has also been to Japan and Nauru. Discuss how you think his travel experiences have influenced his practice. How would those different geographical places be similar and different from each other, physically and culturally?
- Select a work from Mangan's series *Flohetrauling* (2008). Make a detailed study of the techniques used and how these affect the symbolism in the work.
- Mangan's work is mostly monochromatic – look at the monochromatic collage work of Max Ernst and compare the technical and formal aspects of the work of both artists.



### Images above and previous page:

Nicholas Mangan, *Flohetrauling*, 2008  
collage, shelf

5 panels: 30 x 24 cm, 30 x 21 cm, 24 x 30 cm, 35 x 25 cm, 30 x 40 cm. White gloss shelf: 183 x 5 cm.

Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.



## Stuart Ringholt

Stuart Ringholt was born in 1971 in Perth and lives in Melbourne. Ringholt's art practice has become profoundly intertwined with his personal experience, to the extent that he has published a revealing book about his experiences of recovery from mental illness, which was exhibited as part of the exhibition *NEW05* at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

Ringholt's early childhood was happy, but his sister died of leukaemia when he was six; he had to give up playing football because of an injury; and he considered his university degree in graphic design useless. Frustrated with life, he took a three-month job at a roadhouse in the Kimberleys followed by a trip to India, where alcohol and drug use sparked a psychotic episode. He also became physically ill and lost a significant amount of weight. The one constant, "the rope in the dark that dragged me out", was, he says, art, which he'd loved doing throughout his childhood and youth. His practice as an artist has allowed him to experiment with the idea that conceptual art can be useful as a tool for personal healing, to explore the nature of consciousness and how it can be improved.



Ringholt's practice is often performance-based and reliant on audience participation. Documentation of these performances and workshops is exhibited in the form of books, sculpture, photography and painting and video. Each work is part of an overall experiment to test his theory that art can be used to impact personal and social change. His performance works include *Embarrassment* (2004), in which he put himself in compromising situations to make his audiences confront their own fear of embarrassment. In one, he spent a day in a coffee shop wearing a prosthetic nose. In another he stood at social security booths with phlegm running from his nose. He walked about with toilet paper hanging from his trousers, and created fake facial scars with red Textas. These works were performed in Basel in Switzerland (where he had a residency), Florence, Melbourne and Perth.

Alongside his performance work, Ringholt has continued to create collage works that are simple, often singular statements where a circle is cut, and part of an image replaced with another. The images are figurative, and the parts that are replaced are those that we associate most strongly with individual identity – heads, eyes, mouths. Ringholt refers to these as being about "dissolving egoism". The resulting images are both comic and disturbing.

The collages from *Circles Passing* (2007) show images of people with the head of another person replacing their own. Due to this simple alteration, the reading of the image is disrupted; it is impossible to tell who they are or why they are there. His collages command us to stop, ponder and laugh at the bizarre qualities of everyday life.

When asked how his art is practical Ringholt answered:

"I don't know if it *is*, but I am interested in finding out. I am interested in finding out whether art can be super practical beyond the immediate visual and sensory experience. Can art literally improve my life on an interpersonal level? Surprisingly I discovered it can."

## Creating and Making

- After visiting the exhibition research Stuart Ringholt's *Embarrassment* performance works from 2004. In a sensitive way, discuss the things that you and your classmates find embarrassing
- In small groups collaborate to develop these issues into a funny performance work to show to your class
- Notice how scale is used in the series *Circles Passing*. Experiment with making a collage work that utilises different scale to create an unexpected image. What effect does changing the scale make to your work? Is it scary? Or funny? Or something else?



## Exploring and Responding

- In small groups discuss what you think is the purpose of art. Does it have to have a practical purpose? Share your ideas with your class
- How does Ringholt use the element of shape in his series of collages *Circles Passing*? Does shape symbolise something in his work?

## VCE Art/Studio Art

- What are the formal elements in *Circles Passing* that create the fundamental humour inherent in the series?
- Make a formal comparison between *Circles Passing* and *Flohetrauling* by Nicholas Mangan.
- In both cases, comment on the how the aesthetic qualities of the works affect the meanings and messages expressed by the artists.

### Above:

Stuart Ringholt, *Circles Passing* (page 43), 2007  
collage on paper  
33 x 40 cm framed  
Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

### Previous page:

Stuart Ringholt, *Circles Passing* (page 19), 2007  
collage on paper  
33 x 40 cm framed  
Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.



## Joan Ross

Joan Ross was born in Glasgow in 1961 and migrated to Australia in 1962. She lives in New South Wales. From an early age she was instinctively aware of fundamental political issues. When she was eight years old her whole school went to see the Queen on a royal visit to the western suburbs of Sydney. The young Ross refused to go because she “didn’t believe in what the Queen stood for”.

Like many of the other artists in *Cut with the kitchen knife*, Ross has an obsessive, ‘bower-bird’ approach to her practice. Her work utilises everyday materials, and includes drawings, sculptures, installations and videos. Through her practice she explores issues of colonialism and racism. She tackles various ambivalences – the ambivalence felt between the enjoyment of the material benefits brought by colonisation, and the price Indigenous Australia has had to pay for such comfort – an ambivalence that reflects her own contradictory emotions about the materials she uses. In a recent article in *Australian Art Collector* she states:

“I love kangaroo fur, but I was an animal liberationist...I have a love/hate thing going on with it. I sort of hate myself using it and then I absolutely love it and need it. I really need to use it on a political level, because it’s so powerful. “I love the fluoro colour but I hate it as well and I always have. I hate the influx of it. I hate what I’m seeing around me but I still love it. That yellow – I could bury my head in it right now.”



*BBQ this Sunday BYO* (2011) is not a traditional collage, but a five minute video work in which Ross appropriates imagery from the work of the colonial Australian artist and forger Joseph Lycett. Lycett made beautiful copies of the work of other painters, and made subtle but important changes, for instance adding loincloths to the members of the Awabakal tribe from the Newcastle area, to preserve their modesty. The painting that Ross uses as a starting point is called *View of Governors Retreat New Norfolk (Hobart) (1825)* – a place that Lycett never visited himself. Lycett’s painting was as much about making the Australian landscape familiar and agreeable to a European audience as it was about pointing out the differences.

The video begins with a photographic image of the constellation of the Southern Cross in the night sky. This becomes a new version of the Australian flag. Ross says:

“My portrayal of the flag is an attempt to critique the Australian flag as a marker of nationalism and patriotism – aspects of a dominant culture, which can lead to racism. The intention of the usage of the Australian Flag in these ways, may not be racism, but nationalism can develop into racism. We only have to look to 9/11 and the Cronulla race riots still hanging in the national psyche like heavy clouds. People blindly follow each other, draping these flags around themselves and alienating migrants in the act. In this multicultural Australia, it’s quite often an ignorant act.”

Ross alters and plays with Lycett's 'original' in the same way that he made changes to the works that he copied. She added a waterfall, more trees, less houses, and a foreground to serve as a picnic spot, and a BBQ. A narrative evolves, peppered with symbolism, as various characters arrive at the BBQ, and a flotilla of ships floats by, and different animals appear. Finally abstract 'Spirograph' forms fill the sky and become fireworks, and we are transported to New Years Eve or Australia Day celebrations. The question is posed: what does it mean to be 'Australian'? Are the sounds fireworks or gunshots?

### Creating and Making

- Joan Ross appropriates an image of a 19<sup>th</sup> century painting by Joseph Lycett to express particular ideas in her work *BBQ this Sunday, BYO*.
- Research colonial Australian paintings from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and select one to work into a collage artwork. Develop a collage work by combining it with other more contemporary images, perhaps images from popular culture. Consider the meaning and symbolism in your artwork. What ideas are you expressing by combining a historical image with other more contemporary images?



### Exploring and Responding

- Before visiting *Cut with the kitchen knife*, research the colonial historical character Watkin Tench. Who was he? He appears in Joan Ross's animation *BBQ this Sunday, BYO* – what do you think his presence represents?
- Why do you think that Joan Ross has used fluorescent green in her works? What does the colour represent? Discuss this with your class.
- Listen carefully to the sound

track of the video animation *BBQ this Sunday, BYO*. What are the sounds? How many different sounds can you hear? What do they suggest? Listen to the relative volume of the different sounds – what ideas is the artist expressing through the sound track?

### VCE Art/Studio Art

- Joan Ross uses a variety of different images in her animation *BBQ this Sunday, BYO*. Ross has assigned specific meaning to each one. Discuss the signs and symbols used throughout the work. Consider:
- What different kinds of animals appear in the animation? How are their images used?
- What kinds of clothing and textiles appear? How do they contribute to the meaning of the work?
- How does sound function in the work?
- The floating geometric forms that become fireworks are 'Spirograph' forms. What is a Spirograph? Why do you think the artist has used these forms?
- Research the work of Indigenous artist Gordon Bennett. He also tackles the issue of Australia's colonial history, but from a different cultural and gender perspective. Compare his work with that of Joan Ross in terms of techniques, materials and aesthetic qualities, comment on their varying backgrounds.

### Images above and previous page:

Joan Ross, *BBQ this Sunday (Brave New Years)*, 2011; *BBQ this Sunday (end of the world as we know it)*, 2011 pigment print on premium photo paper 76x45cm (unmounted).

Courtesy the artist and Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Sydney.

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