



Jacquie Stockdale: Drawing the Labyrinth

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About this resource

This learning resource is intended for use as a starting point to generate discussion and activities before, during and after a visit to Jacqui Stockdale: Drawing the Labyrinth. It is designed to be used in conjunction with information provided in the exhibition catalogue, gallery wall texts and on the NETS Victoria website. This resource includes biographical information about the artist, and a discussion about the themes of the exhibition. Throughout the document questions are suggested for consideration, and to encourage discussion. They can also be used to generate activities. References to other artists are included, to extend avenues for research. The material in this resource has been created with reference to the Australian Arts curriculum and the VCE Art curriculum. It provides generalised information that can be adapted for different age groups of students, from primary to year 12.

Planning your visit

Before visiting Jacqui Stockdale: Drawing the Labyrinth it is suggested that you contact gallery staff to determine the following.

- Opening hours, transport and parking options, cloakroom facilities and admission fees
- Staff availability for introductory talks and tours
- Education and Public Programs, artist talks etc. that coincide with the exhibition



1. Jacqui Stockdale and her practice

Jacqui Stockdale was born in 1968 in Melbourne and grew up in Benalla. She undertook a Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting) at The Victorian College of the Arts in 1990. Soon after, she moved to Hobart to study Video Art at the University of Tasmania. Stockdale is currently based in Melbourne and is known for her “theatrical portrait photography, figurative paintings, drawings and collages. The artist’s practice explores cultural identity, folklore and the transformative nature of masquerade and ritual in society.”¹

Figuration and the notion of the portrait are key components in Stockdale’s practice. Stockdale applies two very distinct approaches to this subject matter. On the one hand she creates highly staged, stylised and sometimes surreal photographic portraits and paintings, which have a visually rich and elaborate aesthetic. These works deal with the portrait as an indicator of cultural identity, gender, history and relationship to nature; and human rituals of celebration, spirituality and death. To see some examples look at the series called *The Quiet Wild* (2012) and *Familija* (2005) on Stockdale’s website here → <http://jacquistockdale.com/>

A second approach to portraiture that Stockdale applies is that of the sketch, or drawing from life, often completed 'in situ'. In this way the artist makes an immediate response to the world around her – a perceptual, rather than a conceptual approach. This is the approach taken by Stockdale in the work featured in this exhibition, *Drawing the Labyrinth*. And yet the title of the exhibition and the structure of its presentation express some conceptual ideas. Stockdale's participation in Artist in Residence programs and commissions has allowed her to fully explore the idea of portraiture made from life. In 2010 Stockdale was invited to be an Artist in Residence at the Alice Springs Desert Festival. For this residency she created a long roll of ink portraits created on the spot with the sitters. You can see images from this residency on Stockdale's website under the heading *On a Roll (2010)*. In 2016 Stockdale was Artist in Residence with Circus Oz, during which time she made sketch drawings of the circus performers at work, and most recently she has undertaken a residency at Geelong Grammar School, capturing portraits of students and staff.

“I think my personal search is about what connects and transforms us, what is lost and what remains sacred.”

Jacqui Stockdale

Questions to consider

1. Why do you think Jacqui Stockdale chose to study in Tasmania? How might that have affected her practice? In order to reflect effectively on this question you will need to do some research on the history of Tasmania, and you might like to explore the work of nineteenth century portrait artists and photographers Thomas J. Nevin and Robert Dowling.² Compare these with the work of photographer D. T. Kilburn.³

2. Explore the term 'post-colonial', in contemporary art practice. Find some definitions of this term. In relation to this research you can look at the work of Imants Tillers, Joan Ross, and Yasumasa Morimura amongst others.

3. What is the relationship between Stockdale's staged photographic portraits and her drawings and sketches? Consider the difference between the idea of 'perceptual' and 'conceptual' art.

4. Compare the aesthetic qualities of Stockdale's different approaches to making portraits: the highly finished photograph or painting and the sketch 'in situ'.



2. The Art of Portraiture

Human beings have been making images of themselves and other humans for many thousands of years. From ancient cave paintings to the contemporary culture of the 'selfie', we remain fascinated by the idea of the portrait. Before photography, portrait painting was an important tool to provide information about identity and power and social status. In the early medieval period religious icons, copied from originals said to be made directly from life, were used for meditation and prayer. Portraits of nobility were made

in various cultures, to convey power and status. The portrait, either formal or informal, provides a kind of miniature theatrical stage where the elements of clothing, background setting, posture and sometimes objects are used to tell a story about the sitter, to provide the narrative of their life and their identity – the story they want to show to the outside world.

One of the earliest examples in European art history, of the sketched portrait, made directly from life in an immediate way, is in the drawings of Hans Holbein (1497–1543), a German artist based in London. Holbein made highly detailed and decorative paintings of the English aristocracy, but many of his drawings still exist in which he often depicts unknown sitters. The sketch portrait created from life provides very different information about a person, than that contained in detailed painting or photograph.

Impressionists and Post-Impressionists like French artist Henri Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901) focused on the immediate sketch portrait to convey an individual caught in a moment of time in their immediate environment, going about the business of their lives. This un-staged, informal approach gives more of a ‘fly-on-the wall’ image, where the artist is anonymous to the subject of the portrait, observing them from a distance.

In the late nineteenth century, somewhat ironically, the new technology of photography was used to recapture the traditional art of formal portraiture – this can be seen in the highly stylised portraits of middle and upper class European families. The photographic portrait was also used in colonial context to communicate information about the people of ‘The New World’. These images are strongly coloured by the prevalent attitudes of the times in which they were taken.

Questions to consider

1. Take a look at Jacqui Stockdale's portrait series *The Boho*. Compare this work to the work of other artists such as Christian Thompson, Simryn Gill, Cindy Sherman, and Hans Holbein.

2. What different kinds of information or human qualities can be conveyed in a quick sketch from life, compared to a laboriously ‘staged’ formal portrait?

3. Explore the work of nineteenth century American photographer Charles Eisenmann, and compare with the work of Thomas J Nevin.

4. Research and discuss nineteenth century European attitudes to the First Peoples of countries such as Australia and America, and how they can be identified in portraiture of the era. How have those attitudes changed?



3. Stockdale's process

The exhibition *Drawing the Labyrinth* features a continuous drawing made over the period of one year, starting in Barcelona in Spain. The drawing is over fifty metres long. It comprises of hundreds of scenes, mainly portraits depicting the people Stockdale encountered during the year, many of them artists and friends, strangers on public transport and images of her favourite artworks from the Prado, a famous art museum in Madrid.

Spain is a country famous for its traditional festivals, which occur throughout the year. Stockdale was drawn to the vibrant living culture of this country, which is deeply connected to its traditional cultural histories. These are relevant to her artistic concerns linked to cultural identity, human rituals and rites of passage.

The drawings trace her experiences of travel, her family and social life, self-portraits and moments in her life. As such they create a kind of timeline portrait that tells us as much about Stockdale's journey, as it does about the individual subjects in the portraits.

The moving image

The long concertina of images creates individual 'frames' like a film or video, but selecting fragments of action, rather than a continuous flow. German performance artist and photographer Volker Gerling⁴ also creates portraits of the people he meets on his long walking journeys across Europe. Gerling makes his portraits into 'flicker books', which reflect processes of film-making. He shared his portraits with Melbourne audiences at the recent Festival of Live Art.

Structure of the exhibition

The title and structure of the exhibition, in the way that it is displayed in the gallery space invokes the idea of the labyrinth. This connects the material back to the idea of ritual and culture. The labyrinth is an ancient pathway structure that is similar to a maze, but rather than creating 'dead-ends' to fool the traveller, the labyrinth is a continuous pathway that twists and turns and spirals towards a central point. The curving, continuous path that changes direction creates disorientation in the traveller, who is thrown into a heightened awareness of a perpetual present moment. The ritual of walking the labyrinth is used for meditation and contemplation in a variety of different cultures.

Questions to consider

1. Do you think Stockdale took her concertina of paper on her travels with her? Or did she use a sketchbook and construct the concertina drawing in the studio when she returned from her travels? What challenges might she have faced in creating her fifty metre long drawing?
2. How do you think Stockdale chose what to draw on her travels? What does her selection tell you about the artist and her perceptions of her experiences?

3. Research other artworks that use the structure of a concertina to create an exhibition of drawings or prints, or an artists' book. How are they similar and different to Stockdale's work? You can start by looking at the work of Sandra Pearce.

4. Research the traditional festivals of Spain, and the images associated with them. How is this aesthetic reflected in Stockdale's work?

5. Compare Volker Gerling's creative processes with those of Jacqui Stockdale for her work in this exhibition. How are they similar, and different?

6. How does Stockdale's application of the labyrinth structure affect your reading of the meanings and messages expressed in the exhibition?

7. Reflect on how you could adapt and apply Jacqui Stockdale's processes to develop your own folio, or body of work.



4. Drawing as a fundamental aspect of artist's practice

Drawing is a fundamental aspect of not only visual arts practice, but of many other creative processes. Drawing can be used to record your response to moments of everyday life, to gather visual references to use in larger scale artworks, and to

visualise your ideas at their early development stages. Drawings can also stand alone as beautiful and often haunting artworks in their own right. Here are some examples of Australian artists whose work incorporates a strong element of drawing.

Mary Tonkin
John Wolseley
Bernhard Sachs
Vernon Ah Kee
Laith McGregor
Gosia Wlodarczak

Questions to consider

1. Research and compare the work of the above artists. Also look at the drawings of international sculptors Louise Bourgeois and Christo. How do they use drawing in their practice?

2. Research The Dobell Drawing Prize⁵ and the artists featured in it. Select an artist whose work you respond to and think about why you like it.

3. Think about the different ways that you currently use drawing in your own art practice. How could you expand your use of drawing as a medium to express your ideas?

4. What inspiration can you draw from Jacqui Stockdale's practice and processes?

References

1 Jacqui Stockdale's website

<http://www.jacquistockdale.com/About>

2 The National Gallery of Victoria website

<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/depictions-of-aboriginal-people-in-colonial-australian-art-settler-and-unsettling-narratives-in-the-works-of-robert-dowling/>

3 ABC Splash Education Resource website

<http://splash.abc.net.au/home#!/digibook/1974601/representing-indigenous-australians-in-19th-century-art>

4 The Australian

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/visual-arts/portraits-in-motion-volker-gerlings-flipbook-films-come-to-life/news-story/63fc07be806e388b61adfb068f9b0fd9>

5 Art Gallery of New South Wales

<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/close-to-home/>

Review of Stockdale's work for student and teacher reference

<https://artblart.com/2012/05/13/review-jacqui-stockdale-the-quiet-wild-at-helen-gory-galerie-melbourne/>

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Jacqui Stockdale: Drawing the Labyrinth, installation views and workshop images, McClelland Sculpture Park & Gallery, 2016

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