

SYNTHETICA LEARNING GUIDE

A BLINDSIDE AND NETS VICTORIA TOURING EXHIBITION
CURATED BY CLAIRE ANNA WATSON

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ABOUT THIS LEARNING GUIDE

This learning guide is intended for use as a starting point to generate discussion and activities before, during and after a visit to *Synthetica*. 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 an extended introduction to the project with some information about the curator, Claire Anna Watson, suggested points for discussion, and references for further research. The introduction is followed by a section for each individual artist.

You will be viewing the work of regional artists as part of the *Here in the Undergrowth* section of the exhibit. Please contact your local gallery for information about these artists.

The sections in this document about individual artists include some biographical information, direct you to relevant examples of previous works by the artist, and where possible provide links to articles that would be suitable as reference for commentaries relevant to the VCE Art curriculum.

Planning your visit

Before visiting *Synthetica* 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.

- Various issues covered in the introduction of this guide
- 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

Synthetica is relevant to many of the five Art subjects identified in the Australian Curriculum: Directly to Visual Art and Media Art, but indirectly it may provide starting points for ideas that can be explored through Drama, Dance and Music.

Synthetica also draws on issues of nature and culture. Given this, *Synthetica* provides an ideal starting point from which to explore cross-curricula projects, fostering collaboration between teachers and students, across the areas of science, ecology, ethics and philosophy.

Synthetica has been created in partnership with BLINDSIDE, an Artist Run Initiative (ARI) with an exhibition space in the historic Nicholas Building in Melbourne. Discussions around the operation and activities of ARIs like BLINDSIDE, provide a context for exploring career pathways for artists, different types of galleries, alternative approaches to career development and ways in which artists can engage with the community and pursue an independent agenda.

This document is broadly aimed at students from years 4 through to 10 and VCE Units 1-4, however the material may be easily tailored to suit younger students. The material is organised according to the new Australian Curriculum for the Arts.

Throughout the text, artists, groups and organisations are highlighted in blue to suggest starting points for further research.

General Capabilities

Engagement with *Synthetica* provides students with opportunities to address the following general capabilities:

- Literacy
- Information and communication technology capability
- Critical and creative thinking
- Personal and social capability
- Intercultural understanding

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- Artist's practice, ideas and inspiration
- Responding to Artworks: formal analysis, analytical frameworks 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
- Methods and consideration involved in the exhibition design

Career pathways in the art industry

- Throughout this resource there are examples of study pathways and professional experience that can be instructive in developing ideas for career pathways for students in a variety of disciplines

NB If students research the work of Paul Yore they will discover that he identifies as a queer artist, and addresses sexual and gender politics in his practice. This has given rise to a recent court case in which Yore was charged with producing and possessing child pornography. The charges were dismissed. Commentaries on the case are provided in the references. This provides suitable reference material when discussing issues in art as part of the VCE Art curriculum, however please be advised on the explicit nature of some of Yore's work.

Yore's artworks featured in *Synthetica* are not of an explicit nature.

SYNTHETICA - INTRODUCTION

The Curator

Claire Anna Watson is a Melbourne based artist, curator, and arts writer. Watson studied Fine Art at Monash University and has a Graduate Certificate in Public Art from RMIT University in Melbourne. In her own art practice she creates installations, photography and video-based artwork; and has devised public art projects for the shores of the Black Sea in Turkey, a forest in Finland, the rural plains of Portugal and the snowfields of Australia. Her work invites the viewer to consider the transitory nature of existence, through the use of ephemeral materials, and asks us to question our relationship with science and the natural world.

These concerns are also expressed in her work with other artists as a curator. She brings artists together who share the same sensitivity to the issue of human's place in the natural world, how it has changed and how it might unfold in the future. Her selection of artists and artworks also reflects her sense of absurd, sometimes dark, humour.

As Watson's art practice is multidisciplinary, so it is also interwoven with a working life that has many different threads. As a curator, her major projects include *Vertigo* (2014), a touring exhibition for Asialink, *Home* (2013)—reframing craft and domesticity and *Hockey Plot* (2008)—negotiations between young contemporary artists from Gippsland and Melbourne.

Having worked as a curator at the Gippsland Art Gallery, she has a particular interest in the work of regional artists, and seeks to facilitate opportunities for creative exchange between regional and metropolitan artists.

Watson is currently the Chair of the BLINDSIDE Board of Directors. BLINDSIDE is an Artist Run Initiative (ARI) based in the historic Nicholas Building in Melbourne. Watson also works as a curator at Banyule City Council coordinating exhibitions for Hatch Contemporary Arts Space and managing the council's art collection, and she has worked as the Visual Arts Program Coordinator at Asialink.

Writing about other contemporary artists and art issues is also an important aspect of Watsons' work.

Having such a broad working experience gives Watson a perspective that incorporates regional, metropolitan and global concerns and approaches to art practice. Watson aims to connect artists and galleries with their communities, as well as to facilitate connections across different communities in various locations and cultural contexts.

Watson has previously brought together the work of some of the *Synthetica* artists, in an exhibition titled *Vertigo* in 2014, which toured to Indonesia, Taiwan and South Korea. *Vertigo* also included the work of four other artists who are not included in *Synthetica*. In *Vertigo*'s catalogue essay (titled *What happens after tomorrow?*), Watson draws the artworks together through a sense of anxiety and dislocation. She writes: "the artists explore a world that is not always based on logic, but rather a world submerged in disorientation and fracture.... Whether it is through shifts of scale in the natural world, or contemplations on the confusion and paranoia that can affect the human condition, their work traverses a landscape marked by chaos, flux and a slippage between dreamscapes and reality."

By grouping the artists in a new context, Watson has emphasised other meanings in their work. In this way Watson is also exploring her own ideas about artists, art making and the contemporary world.

ACTIVITY

- Experiment with selecting artworks, curating your own exhibition. You could use your own artworks and those of your friends, or you could imagine your exhibition using existing works by other artists – famous ones from historical, or contemporary art.
- Select a theme to begin with, so you can group some artworks together. It could be a conceptual theme, or a formal one.
- Look at the artworks as a group. Write about how the artworks affect each other, and what ideas arise from your grouping. What relationships can you find between the artworks?
- Now change the grouping, choose a new but related theme, based on your reflections from the original 'exhibition'. Take some artworks out, add some, but allow some to remain. Now you have changed the context of your some of your artworks. How has their meaning changed? What new meaning can you see in these artworks?
- Make this activity simpler by creating mini exhibitions with only two or three artworks in them. Make one artwork your constant, and swap the other one or two for different artworks. Reflect on, discuss and write about how the meaning of this (constant) artwork changes and expands, when you put it next to different artworks.

SYNTHETICA THEMES

Exploring the relationship between nature and culture

The term synthetic is an adjective derived from the noun synthesis. Synthesis describes the combining of different things to create something new. Often it refers to chemicals combined to create something artificial that resembles a naturally occurring substance – the term artificial means just that – using ‘art’ or artistry to fool you into thinking something is natural when it isn’t. It’s not what it appears to be. Synthetic fibres used in clothing (e.g. Rayon, Nylon, Polyester, Neoprene) are a good example of this. They mimic naturally occurring fibres like silk, cotton, wool and linen, but they tend to be more durable. With the development of so-called ‘smart’ fabrics, synthetic fabrics are now designed not only to mimic natural ones, but also to extend our natural bodily functions, with the ability to regulate temperature, to conduct electricity, and even administer medications.

In the *Synthetica* catalogue, curator Claire Anna Watson explains: “The distinctions between organic and inorganic matter are becoming increasingly blurred...”

In the past humans have tended to view themselves as distinct from their environment, different from all other creatures, encouraging the idea that other life forms exist in order to serve our needs. In part, this attitude has given rise to the environmental problems that we now face. But as culture and technology change more rapidly, becoming ever more complex, they seem to evolve in manner that closely resembles organic processes. This is demonstrated neatly in the expression that a video clip has ‘gone viral’ on the Internet. The fragment of cultural information has replicated like a virus. Viruses are certainly naturally occurring, however scientists argue about whether or not they are ‘alive’ – in some ways viruses appear to behave in a mechanistic, automatic way.

An example of the expression of this blurring of boundaries between technology and biology is found in Austrian designer Katharina Unger’s project, a partnership with Utrecht University in the Netherlands, to develop a system that cultivates edible plastic-digesting fungi. Meaning that waste plastic can be metabolised or ‘eaten’ by the fungus, and humans can in turn, eat the fungus.

In her catalogue essay, Watson describes how the artworks in *Synthetica* seem to have the potential to behave in an organic way, as if they might be able to reproduce, or are in a state of growing or decaying: “Imbued with life-giving forces, many of the inanimate objects and environments presented, adopted or interrogated in *Synthetica* appear charged with the ability to either self-propagate or alternatively, exist in a state of becoming or dissolution.”

In the exhibition *Vertigo*, Watson explored similar themes of technology and dislocation, however in *Synthetica*, the approach is more playful, theatrical. The word ‘vertigo’ implies dizziness, anxiety, even nausea, but in the *Synthetica* catalogue Robert Heather describes the artworks as ‘brimming with life and wonder’.

Before and/or after your visit to *Synthetica*, use the following questions as starting points for research and discussion:

- Think about the word NATURE. How would you define this term?
- What materials, objects or even behaviours might you consider unnatural?
- Can you trace them back to their original components? What do you discover?
- Reflect on and research the different contexts in which the word nature is used.
- What values and emotions do we attach to the word nature? Research this question so you can provide evidence for your answers.

- What is culture? How would you define this term?
- Do other animals, aside from humans, display behaviours associated with culture? This is a question you might need to research.
- How does technology impact your life? Does it feel 'natural' to you? What do you think humans', and other life forms, relationship with technology will be like in the future?
- Research the work of SymbioticA, based at the University of Western Australia...if you were to work there, what project would you undertake?

- Revisit this discussion after your visit to *Synthetica*. How have your views changed?

- The *Synthetica* catalogue refers to the artworks as using 'performative and theatrical devices'. What are the formal qualities of an artwork that could be described as 'performative' or 'theatrical'? Can you identify some of those formal qualities in the artworks in *Synthetica*? Be specific.

- A famous Australian artist, Patricia Piccinini has explored the boundaries between nature and technology in her work since the mid 1990s. Research Piccinini's work and compare it to the work of the artists in *Synthetica*, who are of a younger generation. What differences can you observe? What similarities?

BLINDSIDE

BLINDSIDE is an Artist Run Initiative (ARI) with an exhibition space on an upper level of the iconic Nicholas Building in Melbourne. Artist Run Initiatives are organisations formed by artists to provide a variety of opportunities for artists to exhibit, collaborate, curate and write in an environment that is supportive of experimentation and speculation. ARIs began to emerge in Australia in the late sixties. They began as mainly exhibition spaces, but over the decades they have evolved to incorporate a broader range of activities such as artist talks, discussion forums, publishing, performance, education and even dinner parties. ARIs create opportunities for artists to meet, converse and collaborate in an informal context. They evolved to provide an alternative to the commercial gallery system, a way for artists to take more control of their professional practices, and to exchange ideas and collaborate on projects – to create a sense of community amongst artists, who might otherwise be more isolated.

The Nicholas Building dates from 1926. The original interior fittings have been preserved, and the building, originally home to the Flinders Street garment trade, has become well known as an important hub for artist, designers and small scale boutique retailers. ARIs often establish spaces in areas that have become subject to urban decay, that are transitioning from an industrial phase into a more contemporary commercial one. ARIs often play a role in drawing creative activities to areas that have been abandoned by old industries. This then paves the way for creative and commercial development.

BLINDSIDE opened in 2004, initiated by artists Renai Grace, Pip Haydon, Simon Koger and Christine Morrow. In 2014 BLINDSIDE published a book that documents their activities over the last decade. *Synthetica* curator Claire Anna Watson is the Chair of the BLINDSIDE board of directors – the team that decides on the direction of the organisation and chooses the projects that they will host and support. The artists featured in *Synthetica* have been part of BLINDSIDE's exhibition program in the past. The organisation has an education program for secondary and tertiary students, it hosts artist talks, publishes critical essays and documents, and has a special on-line gallery for video works called 'PLAY'.

ARIs can come and go within a few years, so it is often interesting to research the activities of ARIs that are no longer in operation. The Ocular Lab Inc. in Brunswick was active between 2003 and 2010, and in 2012 a book documenting their activities was published called *Hostings: Ocular Lab 2003-10*. This book is published by an independent publishing company, Surpllus, which specialises in artists' books, zines, exhibition catalogues, critical writing and theory. Surpllus describes itself as an organisation "conceived as a platform for dialogue and exchange, and as a channel for the initiation or dissemination of unconventional print projects. Surpllus is also intended as an inquiry into contemporary publishing strategies...". This demonstrates a strong relationship

between ARIs and publishing, the publishing company itself operating in a similar way to an ARI. Currently Melbourne's longest running ARI, Platform Inc., which has an exhibition space in the subway under Flinders Street Station, also operated a shop called Sticky, which sold zines, badges and artist published materials. Sticky now operates independently, and has become one of Australia's largest sellers of zines, stocking work from the United States, UK, Germany, France, China, Japan and New Zealand.

ARIs are more common in urban areas, however there are some examples of ARIs operating in regional areas. Cowwarr Art Space in Gippsland is a long-running ARI that has been in operation since 1993. In 2000 artist Tamara Marwood initiated an ARI called Allan's Walk in a laneway space in an old shop in Bendigo. Up until its closure 2010, Allan's Walk played an important role in the Bendigo arts community, and also provided opportunities for exchange between regional and metropolitan based artists.

NB Please refer to the *Synthetica* Catalogue for Dan Rule's detailed history of ARIs in Australia, titled *Making, Talking, Doing: A Possible Archaeology of the Australian ARI*.

Activity

- Explore ARIs in your local area. Perhaps there has been one operating that has now closed. Try contacting your local council arts officer or staff at your local gallery to find out.
- See if you can interview some of the artists involved. Ask them how they set up the ARI, and why.

HERE IN THE UNDERGROWTH

Making Art in a Regional Context

Synthetica is accompanied by an exhibition called *Here in the Undergrowth*, which includes artworks by artists from the region in which the exhibition is being shown on its tour to various galleries across Victoria and New South Wales. *Synthetica* and *Here in the Undergrowth* will tour to Wangaratta Art Gallery, Swan Hill Regional Art Gallery, Counihan Gallery in Brunswick, Melbourne, Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale and Wagga Wagga Art Gallery. After the tour, a selection of works from the different *Here in the Undergrowth* exhibitions will be invited to exhibit in a group exhibition at BLINDSIDE in Melbourne.

Claire Anna Watson has created a blog to document her travels, researching artists practicing in the regional areas where *Synthetica* will tour (see References for the link to Claire's Facebook blog).

Different regional areas have their own unique histories and environments. Artists practicing in regional areas respond to these varying cultural conditions in different ways.

Artists practicing in Regional Australia may have been born and raised in their local area, or they may have moved from a larger metropolitan centre, or from somewhere remote. Often artists move out of a big city, and into regional areas because rents and property prices are lower, or because they prefer a cleaner, more natural environment. The presence of tertiary educational institutions is also an important factor in the development of an artistic community in a particular region. La Trobe University has a campus in Bendigo in Central Victoria, which has a large visual art department, and an off-site gallery space (La Trobe University Visual Arts Centre) in the central arts precinct of Bendigo. These factors support and nurture Bendigo's lively arts scene. Monash University had a campus in the small town of Churchill in Gippsland, now part of Federation University Australia, which continues to provide visual arts courses. The presence of gallery spaces is also an important factor, providing opportunities for artists to exhibit, and engage with their community in other ways, such as artist talks and workshops. In areas with a history of gold mining, often the presence of a School of Mines, usually established in the late nineteenth century, provides a cultural backdrop of artisanship and arts and crafts education. This has seeded a strong tradition of art and craft production in gold producing regions.

Researching artists in your local region

- What specific conditions in your local region do you think might influence artists practicing in your area? Consider the shape and nature of the landscape, the weather, the history of the area, the architecture, the dominant industries, the presence of communities from different cultural groups in the population, the presence or absence of Indigenous communities and culture.
- Research educational institutions in your area that provide visual art courses. These might be universities or TAFEs or adult education organisations like Continuing Education. Perhaps a local artist runs courses at their studio.
- What opportunities exist in your area for artists to exhibit their work, meet one another and exchange ideas? These could constitute a variety of different types of galleries or alternative exhibition spaces. Perhaps there are some old buildings with artists' studios in them, or perhaps there is an annual or biannual arts festival in your area, or close by.
- How does your local gallery engage with local artists? Do they have a dedicated space for local artists to exhibit? Do they include local artists in their program? Ask the gallery Curator or Education Officer.
- How does your local council support artists? Do you have a Council Arts Officer? What services do they provide for artists?
- The artists featured in your unique version of *Here in the Undergrowth* may be providing an artist talk during the exhibition. They may come and do a talk for your school, or you might be able to contact them through the gallery to ask them some questions. Ask them about the different factors that influence their work. How much of their ideas and aesthetic style is influenced by the unique qualities of the region in which they live? What are the unique professional challenges and opportunities that exist for them in your local area? If the artist is not available you can ask the gallery staff, or you can observe their artwork and see if you can find evidence in their work for the influence of their practice as a regionally based artist.

THE ARTISTS

Boe-lin Bastian

Background

Boe-lin Bastian is an artist who works with video and installation. Born in Canberra in 1986, in 2011 she graduated from RMIT in Melbourne, where she now lives and works. During her undergraduate studies, Bastian undertook an exchange to Glasgow School of Art in Scotland, where she completed her honours year studying 'spatial practice' in the School of Sculpture and Environmental Art. 'Spatial' practice is a term that has been used in tertiary institutions since the late 90s. It indicates a movement away from thinking about sculpture in traditional terms of independent, discreet objects that occupy space without necessarily relating to it. The term incorporates sculpture, installation and time based works like video and performance: works that involve objects, and/or bodies, and embrace or 'activate' the space and time in which they exist. Bastian is currently completing a Master of Arts and Cultural Management at the University of Melbourne.

Artist Statement

I make videos and rudimentary sculptures in order to better comprehend the strangeness of motion, gravity and momentum. My works operate at the juncture of object and action, drawing from a post-minimalist aesthetic and increasingly mixing old and new technologies. Critiques on humour, accident and the nature of impermanence inform the way that I think about my work.

The investigation of the innate qualities of materials and their relative scale is an ongoing interest. Equally important is the tendency of the viewer to project meaning and narrative onto existing sculptural forms. This tension between implied and projected meaning is key to my practice.

When working with objects, I liken the force of gravity to a punch line and enjoy exploring the changing states between balance and imbalance. By using ephemeral materials, I hope to give form to the passing of time, implying an idea of beauty as unexpected and immediate in contrast to an idea of beauty as rarefied.



Boe-lin Bastian, *Jellies. Coupling Series* 2010
HD Video (still), 4.13 minutes
Image courtesy of the artist

In the two artworks featured in *Synthetica*, Bastian uses her materials to set up complex relationships that stimulate the viewer to imagine 'plot lines', even 'back stories' and outcomes. The video work *Jellies. Coupling Series* is part of a series of works grouped together under the concept of 'coupling'. The relationship between two sculptural forms in motion is a crucial element of these works. Other works that form this series, can be viewed on Bastian's website, listed in References.

These things happen is a sculptural installation that uses the relationship between objects to create an expectation in the viewer of future action. However the story is not straightforward. The various forces of helium gas and gravity, and the presence of the nails on bricks, invoke opposing forces in which expectations for dramatic outcomes will inevitably be disappointed. A smaller version of this work is exhibited in *Synthetica*, as seen in the image below.

Find an article from Art Monthly Australia issue 265 (November 2013) at the below link. The article by Naima Morelli features a short interview with Boe-lin Bastian, and is a useful insight into the professional lives of young artists.

<http://www.naimamorelli.com/published-artist-waitress-body-art-monthly-australia/#more>



Boe-lin Bastian, *These things happen* 2012
Astro-turf, helium balloons, nylon, tacks and found bricks
Image courtesy of the artist

Responding

(address these questions as extended written answers, dot point answers, group discussion or discussion in pairs with reporting back to the group)

- Before or after your visit to *Synthetica* compare Boe-lin Bastian's work to that of Daniel von Sturmer. What ideas and concerns do these artists have in common? How is their work different from each other? How is it similar?
- What is the impact of number on the meaning of the work *Jellies. Coupling Series*? What would happen if the numbers were increased to three or four forms?
- Explore the role of the washing machine in *Jellies. Coupling Series*. What art elements does it provide in the artwork?
- How does Boe-lin Bastian use colour in her both the works in this exhibition? What meanings and messages does it convey?
- How is time used in *Jellies. Coupling Series*? Are there moments when you are bored? Or surprised or excited, or even scared? When and why did you laugh? How does timing affect your emotions when you view this work?
- Before or after your visit to *Synthetica* explore the other works in Bastian's *Coupling Series*, you can view them on her website. Compare the different works. What different strategies has the artist used to explore different aspects of coupling?
- If the jellies were people, what sort of personalities would they have?
- In *These Things Happen*, the artist arranges simple objects to invoke a particular environment. What sort of environment is it?
- What do you imagine might happen to the objects in *These Things Happen*, as time passes?

Making

- Set up a group of objects to suggest that something might happen, like Boe-lin Bastian does in *These Things Happen*. How can you adjust your objects to create confusion and tension in your audience? Document your installation by photographing it. Perhaps you could make a drawing of an imaginary installation.
- Experiment with how you can use motion and balance in your work – is there something in your environment that you could use to generate motion. What sort of materials would respond well to being set in motion? Notice how Bastian uses soft, fluid materials like jelly and plastic bags.

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- Research Boe-lin Bastian's *Coupling* series. In these artworks how has the artist used formal elements to create a feeling of anthropomorphism in the viewer? What aesthetic qualities add to this effect?
- In 2011 the Victorian Government created an advertising campaign about saving energy in the home. They used the image of a balloon to represent energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. Here is a link to the TV advertisement: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SELS6-ss_g. Compare the Black Balloon campaign with the Bastian's work *These Things Happen*. Explore how similar images convey different meanings and messages. Compare the different contexts of the images, a TV advertising campaign and an artwork in a gallery. How does that affect their meanings?

Simon Finn

Background

Simon Finn was born in Melbourne in 1976 where he currently works and lives. He studied Electronic Design and Interactive Media at Swinburne University, completed Honours in Fine Art at RMIT, and Masters of Fine Art at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2013. Finn is a lecturer in Animation and Games Design, and has worked as a 3D visualisation artist and in special effects in film and television production. Finn explores movement and stillness in his work, in a number of different ways: He uses computer-generated imagery to create images that he uses as a basis for carefully rendered charcoal drawings; he uses a computer program to create forms that he then 'prints' into 'synthetic' sculptures with a 3D printer; and he creates computer-generated animations.

Artist Statement

My studio practice generates artworks that are an exploration of temporal representations and the variable syntheses between artist, environment and technology. The works investigate the boundaries of sight, experience and scientific visualisation by de-centring the human in networks of artistic production.

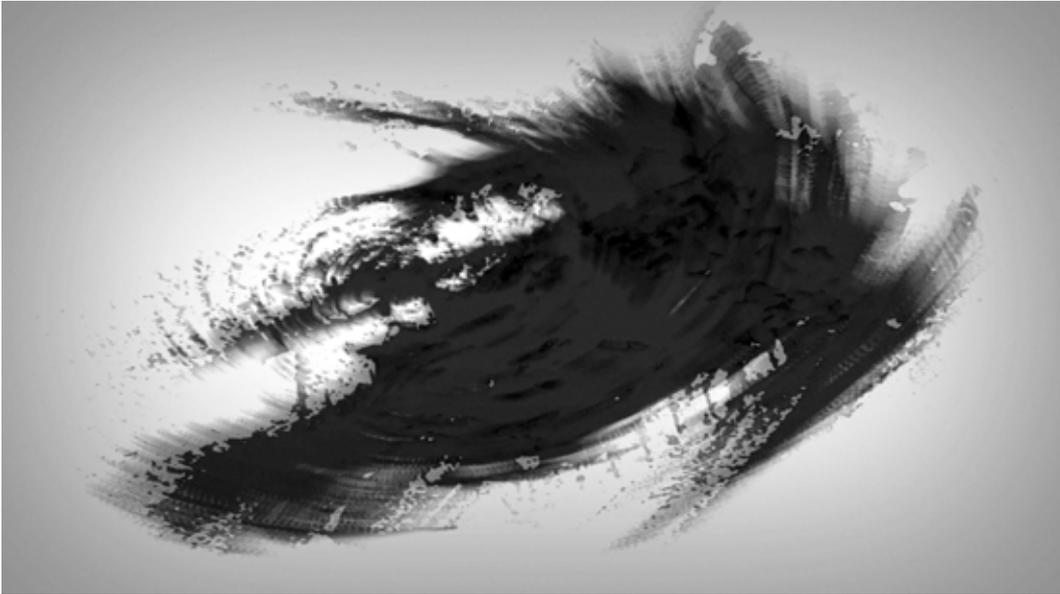
Computation effectively provides highly complex processes, from which a series of sequential images are derived for further analysis. Through these technologies I employ precision geometry, accurate lighting systems and exact surface definitions for generating believable subject matter for drawing. The range of static imagery generated by computation is staged and then re-imagined through the hand, using traditional drawing processes. Using technology to observe an otherwise unattainable rupturing of time facilitates a faceted network of production. This approach to moving image construction offers a framework for considering the validity of artistic experimentation with motion-based subject matter as it disperses into the static. The works are a re-linking of the corporeal with the machine, in order to re-colonize the image.



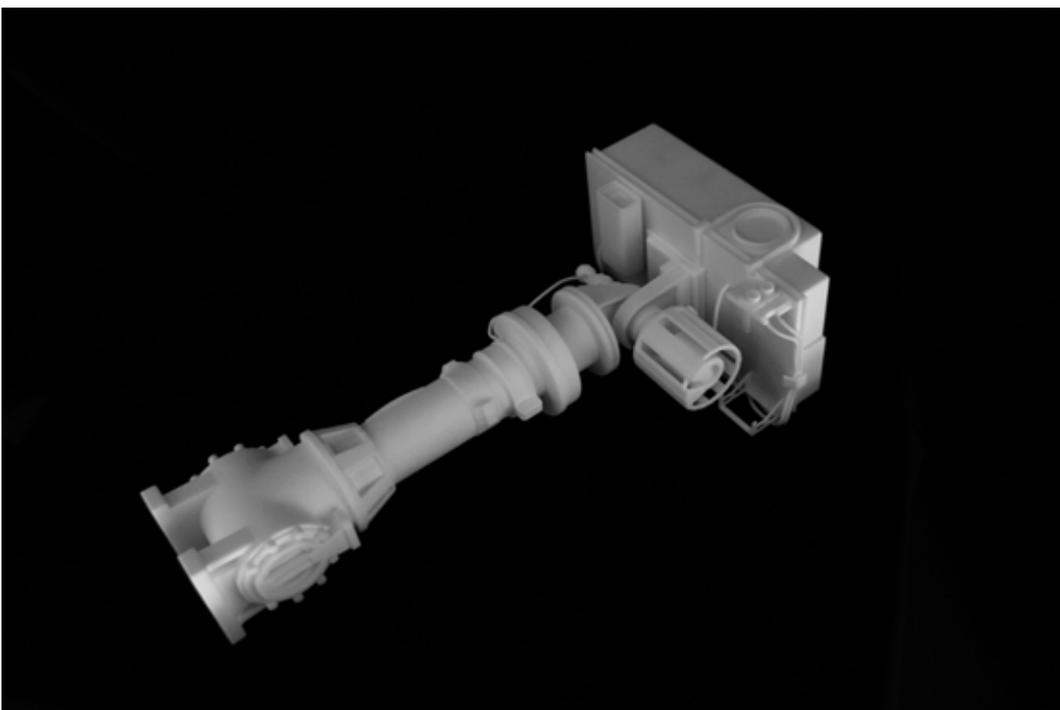
Simon Finn, *Synthetic Surge* 2012
Charcoal on paper, 85 x 150 cm
Image courtesy of the artist and Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne

Through his artwork, Simon Finn explores forces of nature in motion. He uses complex computer programming to simulate these forces, such as the crashing wave of a tsunami, the force of gravity on an object, or the explosion of a planet. He uses these animation sequences to break motion down into its' component moments, or 'facets' and then creates meticulous, velvety and sensuous drawings from them. The works *Stages of Descent* and *Simulant* represent the camera that accompanied a NASA Mars Rover in its' exploration of the surface of Mars. *Stages of Descent* uses multiple repeated images to trace the imaginary slow fall of the camera through an ocean.

Find an interview with Simon Finn here: <http://www.artcollector.net.au/ArtistinterviewSimonFinnEscher>



Simon Finn, *Surge Sequence* 2012
HD video, 1080p, 1 minute 25 seconds
Image courtesy of the artist and Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne



Simon Finn, *Simulant* 2012
Synthetic polymer, 8 x 15 x 30cm
Image courtesy of the artist and Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne

Responding

(address these questions as extended written answers, dot point answers, group discussion or discussion in pairs with reporting back to the group)

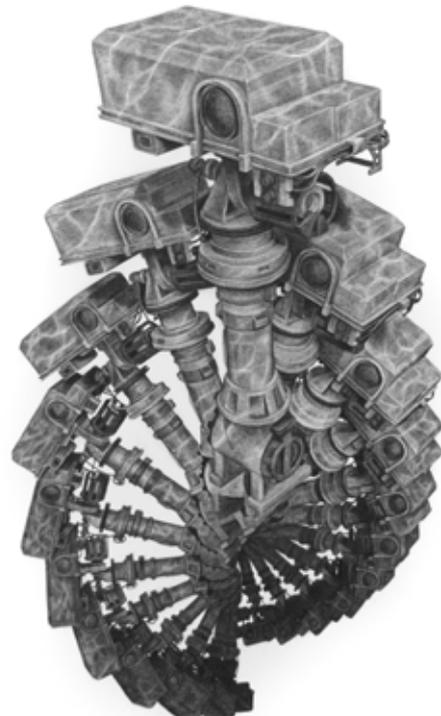
- Before or after visiting *Synthetica*, explore the work of Dutch artist M.C. Escher, active in the early-mid twentieth century. Compare the drawings and processes of the two artists – they both draw heavily on mathematics in the construction of their drawings. How are their practices similar and different?
- Discuss the similarity between Finn's drawings and natural forms. What forms in nature do his images suggest?
- Explore how Finn utilises the art element of Repetition in his work. Describe how it is used and what its affects are – how does it influence the meaning of the artwork?
- Finn's images represent processes of falling, crashing and exploding. Things that have had form and use are returning to a state of chaos. What emotions do these processes invoke in the viewer, in you? What do these images and emotions add to the meaning of the artworks?
- What art elements has the artist used to create mood in his drawings? What adjectives would you use to describe their mood? Is the mood in Finn's drawings different to the mood in his animation? How? Use the art elements in constructing your answer.
- How have new technologies impacted the aesthetic style of Simon Finn's artworks?
- Why do you think Simon Finn makes charcoal drawings when he can create images easily on a computer?

Making

- Explore different ways of representing the passage of movement in your work. What different techniques and technologies could you use? They could be digital, or simple.
- Explore ways that you could tell their story – write it down, improvise some scenes, write a script, collaborate with other classes e.g. Music or Drama to create a performance work.
- Hold a memory day at school – it doesn't have to be for adults, you can explore your own memories. What are the themes that come out of your research?

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- Make a comparison between the life experience and cultural contexts of Simon Finn and well-known artist M.C. Escher. What historical events or environments have influenced these artists?
- Research the activities of the numerous Mars Rovers. What do you think these activities represent culturally? What names are they given and why? How does the invoking of the exploration of Mars affect the meanings and messages in Simon Finns' artwork?
- Explore the possibilities for social and political meaning in Simon Finns' artworks.



Simon Finn, *Stages of Descent* 2013
Charcoal on paper, 85 x 70cm
Image courtesy of the artist and Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne

Bonnie Lane

Background

Video installation artist Bonnie Lane was born in Melbourne in 1986, and she now lives and works in Melbourne, Los Angeles and New York. Lane completed her undergraduate degree in painting at the Victorian College of the Arts, and went on to finish her honours year at Monash University in 2010. Lane has undertaken a number of international artist residencies in Norway, Portugal, and South Korea. In 2010 Lane received a grant that allowed her to spend a year working in the United States. You'll find an interview in which Lane talks about this experience here:

<http://www.bonnie-lane.net/bio.html>

Artist Statement

By exploring emotional responses to the world in which we live, my predominantly video-based practice focuses on universal human experience, often from an existential perspective. My video pieces utilise the atmosphere and history of existing architectural spaces to create immersive environments to be 'stepped into'.

Though somewhat contradictory I utilise new technologies and media to capture sentiment and nostalgia with an aim to create a purely human dialogue from artwork to viewer, viewer to artwork. Through visual techniques such as masking and unusual methods of video projection, I aim to escape the 'flat rectangle screen' and explore video as a means of recreating memory and sensorial experience. My works often result in sculptural forms with videos projected onto objects and unusual surfaces in an attempt to make the inanimate come alive.

My artworks are often wholly or partly autobiographical, an amalgamation of experiences and memories, dreams and nightmares, fears and fantasies.



Bonnie Lane, *Make Believe* 2012,
Single channel HD video, 1 hour 5 minutes
Image courtesy of the artist and Anna Pappas Gallery, Melbourne

Bonnie Lane's video installation works draw on her experiences of childhood, from her perspective as an adult. She explores nostalgia and cultural notions about childhood. She also looks at the meaning of existence itself. Lane likes to take her films beyond the screen by projecting them, sometimes onto unexpected surfaces and objects. This gives a sense of fragmentation and distortion to the image, and it gives the illusion that the object 'comes to life'. For the work *Make Believe*, Lane used footage of a young girl dancing in front a glittering gold backdrop. The footage was processed through a kaleidoscopic lens to create the hypnotic, abstracted sequence that comprises the final work.

Find the catalogue essay for *Make Believe* by Suzanne Fraser here:

http://www.bonnie-lane.net/documents/BonnieLaneEssay_000.pdf



Bonnie Lane, *Life is pain* 2010,
Single channel HD video, 7 minutes 9 seconds (silent)
Image courtesy of the artist and Anna Pappas Gallery, Melbourne

Responding

(address these questions as extended written answers, dot point answers, group discussion or discussion in pairs with reporting back to the group)

- If you look at other examples of Bonnie Lane's on her website, you will see that she has used a circular format in a number of her works, as she does in *Make Believe*. Why do you think Lane has done this? What ideas, feelings and images does the circle evoke? What does a circle mean to you? Where else do you see circles in life and in art?
- What is the impact of slow motion on this work? What would the effect be if the girl was dancing in real time? Use adjectives to describe the movement in *Make Believe*.
- Compare the size of the two works *Life is pain*, and *Make Believe*. Why do you think the artist has chosen to make one bigger than the other? How does it effect the meaning of the artworks
- Describe the feelings you have when you watch the fish in their bowl in *Life is pain*.
- The titles that Lane has chosen for these artworks are interesting – why has she chosen them? How do they affect the way you interpret the images?

Making

- Kaleidoscopes create their effects by using moving mirrors. Use a number of mirrors to experiment with ways of distorting imagery. See if you can create a mandala like circular image. Perhaps you can get similar effects using a computer program.
- Use your experiments to create a series of drawings, paintings, collages or photographs.
- What meanings does your artwork express?

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- What meanings and messages about childhood are conveyed in the work *Make Believe*? Describe how these meanings are expressed in formal terms, using art elements.
- Make a comparison between the aesthetic qualities of *Make Believe* and *Life is Pain*. How are they similar and different? How does that affect the meaning and messages of the artworks?
- Research the work of international video projection artists Pipilotti Rist and Bill Viola. Here is an interview with Rist: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKR-QhjOz-o>. Compare the practices and processes of these artists to that of Bonnie Lane. Bill Viola is from America, Pipilotti Rist is from Europe (Switzerland) and Bonnie Lane comes from Australia. Do you see any evidence of their country of origin in their work? How does this reflect on the art industry in the twenty first century?

Kristin Mclver

Background

Kristin Mclver was born in Melbourne in 1974. She now lives and works in Melbourne and New York. Mclver has a professional background in graphic design. In 1996 she completed a Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design at Monash University, and in 2009 she completed a Masters of Fine Art at The Victorian Collage of the Arts. Mclver works primarily with language, using neon to create minimalist text based installations. Her practice also includes sculpture and painting.

Artist Statement

The works in *Synthetica* continue my investigation into art and identity in the age of hyper-capitalism. *Thought Piece (What's Going On?)* is part of an installation series which explores the notion of identity as commodity. The work transposes digital subject matter into physical objects to highlight the tangible economic value placed on our thoughts and desires. Thought Piece appropriates language from the seemingly innocuous status prompts of applications such as Facebook. On approach the viewer encounters a mass of concrete paving stones, inscribed with my thoughts, both public and private. The work raises questions about the authenticity of online identity, and highlights its gross commodification.

Divine Intervention proposes that the media and digital age have created a perpetual desiring machine, resulting in a global culture obsessed with material consumption. As corporations expand their markets into remote corners of the globe, the environment becomes subject to commodification. Natural habitats are destroyed in order to make way for newer, better environments; seemingly an improvement on that provided by nature. In an attempt to satiate burgeoning desires, “utopian” cities are being realised in defiance of their natural environment. Around the globe, cities such as Dubai have evolved before our eyes as spectacular, extraordinary, utopian visions that propose a better future—seducing the western world into an unsustainable capitalist fantasy.



Kirstin McIver is inspired by the language and imagery of advertising, and how those who work in that industry are continually devising new ways to seduce us into consuming more products. She explores the emotions around desire, and aims to encourage her audience to look beyond the surface of advertising slogans and to analyse the tropes of our consumer society. She explores the identities that we construct on social media, and looks at them in terms of the commodification of the self.

Find a 2013 interview with Kristin McIver here:

http://www.designartmagazine.com/2013/05/interview-australian-visual-artist_22.html

And a more recent one here:

<http://www.townhallgallery.com.au/2014/07/in-conversation-kristin-mciver.html>



Previous page:

Kristin McIver, *Thought Piece (What's Going On?)* 2013,
Neon, steel, concrete, motion sensors, vinyl, neurons, electrical impulses,
Dimensions variable
Image courtesy of the artist and James Makin Gallery, Melbourne and
Liverpool Street Gallery, Sydney

This page:

Kristin McIver, *Divine Intervention* 2011
Neon, light, metal, artificial plants
180 x 150 x 150 cm
Image courtesy of the artist and James Makin Gallery, Melbourne and
Liverpool Street Gallery, Sydney

Responding

(address these questions as extended written answers, dot point answers, group discussion or discussion in pairs with reporting back to the group)

- Take it in turns to read out some of the words on the bricks in *Thought Piece*. Where do you think the words come from?
- How does the question on the neon sign 'What's going on?' relate to the text on the bricks?
- Mclver's *Thought Piece* and Boe-lin Bastian's *These Things Happen* both incorporate bricks as a key material. Compare how each artist has used this fundamental building material to articulate their ideas. How are the bricks arranged differently? What different functions do they serve? What colour are they? What different meanings do they bring to the artworks?
- In the work *Divine Intervention*, Mclver uses artificial plants along with the slogan 'LIFE UNLIMITED'. Why has the artist combined these objects and text? Is the statement true? What would happen if life was unlimited? What do you think the artist is trying to say?
- Do you think that text is an effective tool to use in artworks? Why?
- In an interview for Town Hall Gallery in Hawthorn, Melbourne, Mclver cites American artist John Baldessari as an inspiration. Before or after viewing *Synthetica*, research his work and analyse how he has influenced Kristin Mclver's practice. Compare their artworks.
- Can you think of very famous artist who also began his career as a graphic designer?

Making

- Collect sections of text from advertising on billboards, in magazines or on television or the Internet, anywhere you see an ad. Try to avoid using the product names, in order to isolate the language that is used to surround the products. What do you notice?
- Experiment with different ways of using your gathered text to make an artwork. Artists have been working with text since the beginning of the twentieth century with the Cubist artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. See what other examples you can find to inspire your work.

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- Research the work of famous artists Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer, compare their work to that of Kristin Mclver.
- How has Mclver's choice of materials and techniques impacted the meanings and messages in her artwork?

Kate Shaw

Background

Kate Shaw was born in Sydney in 1969. She lives and works in Melbourne and New York. In 1994 Shaw attained a Bachelor of Fine Arts from RMIT University in Melbourne, and in 1997 she completed a Diploma of Museum Studies at Deakin University. Shaw has worked as an independent curator and a teacher. She is primarily a painter, but also works with video.

Artist Statement

My practice aims to convey ideas of nature, alchemy and cycles of creation/destruction. The paintings and video works deal with the tensions and dichotomies in the depiction of the natural world and our relationship to it. I am concurrently exploring the sublime in nature whilst imbuing a sense of toxicity and artificiality in this depiction. The intention is to reflect upon the contradiction between our inherent connection to the natural world and continual distancing from it. The video *The Spectator* combines footage of natural disasters from YouTube and video of the poured paint. I am seeking to draw out the ambiguities of how technology has distanced our relationship to the natural world whilst creating more immediate access to spectacular and disastrous natural events.

Kate Shaw creates her brightly coloured paintings by pouring paint onto a surface, then allowing it to dry, and peeling it off the surface, like a skin. She then cuts these into various landscape-like forms and recombines them as a collage. She allows the way the colours blend and combine, resembling organic forms, to inspire her ideas for paintings. Shaw's work expresses her interest in the physical and chemical attributes of the planet. The swirling liquid colours seem to represent the molten core of the planet that hides under the surface that seems so strong and solid. Recent natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis demonstrate that the earth is not a solid as it may appear. Her video work *The Spectator* explores how, due to the prevalence of media and mobile recording devices, we become an audience to the ever-unfolding spectacle of global natural disasters, consuming them as entertainment.¹

1 Haley, Stephen. Kate Shaw: Amping up the magic hour [online]. Artlink, Vol. 31, No. 4, Dec 2011: 38-41



Kate Shaw, *La-la Land* 2013
Acrylic and resin on board, 30 x 70cm
Image courtesy of the artist and Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne



- Describe the different images you can see in *The Spectator*?
- Can you guess where the different footage has been filmed?
- Use adjectives to describe the mood that the images in *The Spectator* create when they are overlaid and interwoven.

Making

- How can you create an artwork where chance and fluidity play a role in creating the image?
- Experiment with marbling techniques and create a collage with your marbled paper.
- Create an image of a landscape using collage. Use photographs from old magazines or books that you don't want to keep any more. Try to make your work look like a landscape, in the way you cut out the shapes, but don't use photographs of the landscape in your collage materials.



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- Research the work of the Sublime or Romantic landscape painters of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for instance Caspar David Friedrich. In what way does Shaw reference these works in her paintings and video works? Outline the formal similarities and differences that you observe.
- How has the historical context of the artists influenced or shaped the differences that you have observed?
- In producing her first video work, *The Spectator*, Kate Shaw was inspired by the eighteenth century object called a Claude Glass. Research what this object was and how it was used. What parallels does it have in our contemporary environment?

Responding

(address these questions as extended written answers, dot point answers, group discussion or discussion in pairs with reporting back to the group)

- Kate Shaw's paintings are highly coloured. Describe the colours in art terminology – are they mostly primary or secondary? Complementary, or harmonious?
- What do the colours make you think of? Do they seem natural or artificial?
- How does Shaw create the illusion of water in her paintings?
- Before or after visiting *Synthetica* research the work of Paul Gauguin and the Fauves movement. Compare these works to Kate Shaw's paintings. Almost a century later, what differences can you see in the way the work is produced and the way it looks. What has influenced these changes?

Top:

Kate Shaw, *The Spectator* (still) 2012

Single channel HD video, 4 minutes

Image courtesy of the artist and Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne

Bottom:

Kate Shaw, *Nadaville* 2013

Acrylic and resin on board, 30 x 70cm

Image courtesy of the artist and Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne

Alice Wormald

Background

Painter Alice Wormald was born in Auckland in 1987. She lives and works in Melbourne. Wormald completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2011.

Artist Statement

I create paintings that depict impossible spaces where surface and depth, representation and abstraction and naturalism and artifice converge. My paintings are based on collages using found images of natural and geological formations, vegetation, rocks and landscapes. The assembled imagery bypasses narrative in order to concentrate on the surfaces of the paper objects that are depicted, and the formal elements of the painting itself. This creates a compelling encounter between the physical depth of the images that have been represented and the abrupt white edges that hint at their origin as printed pieces of paper, rather than the natural forms that they portray. The natural elements are not presented as pristine objects, but are instead cut, reassembled and carefully reconfigured to mimic the format of a landscape, exposing an unsettling hybrid which locates itself in the psychological rather than the physical and reflects upon the contested distinction between what is natural and what is real. This is suggestive not of the panorama, historically associated with an ideal, organised and understood nature, but of the occluded view, a secluded and sensual space where distance is concealed and danger lurks.

Alice Wormald's paintings begin life as collages made from nature photographs in books and magazines. The resulting landscapes are strange, with a sense of distorted scale and organic forms of uncertain origin. Wormald makes her process explicit by carefully painting the cut edges of the original photographs. Collage became an important art form during the twentieth century, and Wormald references this rich history in her paintings, as well as more traditional forms of landscape painting.

Find an article that clearly explains Alice Wormald's process and influences here:

<http://www.broadsheet.com.au/melbourne/art-and-design/article/grappling-landscapes-alice-wormalds-ordinary-pictures>



Left:
Alice Wormald, *Reeds Japan* 2013
Oil on linen, 85 x 85 cm
Image courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer, Melbourne



Right:
Alice Wormald, *Giddy Heights* 2012
Oil on linen, 122 x 89 cm
Image courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer, Melbourne

Responding

(address these questions as extended written answers, dot point answers, group discussion or discussion in pairs with reporting back to the group)

- Alice Wormald has used the paintings of Georgia O'Keefe and William Robinson to inspire her compositions. Before or after visiting *Synthetica*, research the work of these painters. Identify formal qualities in Alice Wormald's paintings that reflect this influence. Consider colour, shape, composition, scale, space.
- Can you identify some of the things in the original photographs?
- Compare the use of collage in Alice Wormald's and Kate Shaw's paintings. How is Alice Wormald's approach to landscape different to Kate Shaw's?
- Choose your favourite of the three paintings by Alice Wormald. Explain the reasons for your choice. Share your ideas with the group, and use your different perspectives to compare each painting, in terms of mood and aesthetic qualities.
- Do the paintings make you think of anything other than landscape? What are the formal qualities in the paintings that provoke these connections?
- What meanings can you draw out of these paintings, about the landscape, and the natural world?

Making

- Use the same process as Alice Wormald, but apply it to a different tradition in painting. Perhaps interiors, or portraiture, or still life. If you chose interiors, you might gather images of built structures, or details of furniture or images from interior design magazines. Your compositions don't have to be realistic – think of them in terms of shape.
- What different meanings arise out of your artwork, about culture, society or nature?

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- Alice Wormald's paintings do not attempt to present a cohesive view of the landscape. Identify the meanings and messages contained in them with reference to nature and culture.
- Wormald's paintings draw on various traditions of landscape painting, including Japanese ones. Research Japanese landscapes and identify the similarities and differences with Wormald's work. Explore the cultural influences on the style of Japanese landscapes.



Alice Wormald, *Rock Stack* 2013
Oil on linen, 102 x 71 cm
Image courtesy of the artist and Daine Singer, Melbourne

Paul Yore

Background

Paul Yore was born in 1987. He lives and works in Melbourne. Described as an interdisciplinary artist, Yore is broadly educated, having studied painting, ancient history, archaeology and anthropology. He works with a variety of everyday and found materials including plasticine, embroidery, collage, found objects and mechanised moving parts. He also uses video, sound and drawing. His work could be termed 'sculptural installation'. Recently he has made embroidered wall works. Yore identifies as a queer artist, and he addresses sexual and gender politics in his practice. This has given rise to a recent court case in which Yore was charged with producing and possessing child pornography. The charges were dismissed and the magistrate commented on the heavy-handed approach of the police, who defaced Yore's artwork.¹

Paul Yore's court case provides a good basis for discussion on issues in art, within the VCE Art curriculum. This can be compared to similar cases involving the work of artists such as Bill Henson and Polixeni Papapetrou. A collection of articles and commentaries about the case can be found here:

<http://www.excerptmagazine.com/blog/paul-yore>

Artist Statement

At the heart of my practice is the notion that the things around us are not what they may first appear to be. This could be a 'slippage', an everyday material standing in for something sublime or unspeakable, an unexplainable juxtaposition, or just a silly pun. In a broader sense, I want my work to pose an epistemological question of sorts, something like: "what the hell are we even doing here?" I feel art (if it has any use beyond mere decoration) should be able to pose uncomfortable questions, or at least point to the absurdity of the human situation, even if it cannot endeavour to resolve any specific problem we might face as a doomed species, as a dysfunctional nation-state or as alienated individuals.

1 Russel, Mark and Cooper, Adam. Child Pornography charges against artist Paul Yore dismissed, The Sydney Morning Herald, 1 Oct 2014



Paul Yore, *WHEN WILL IT END 2014*
Mechanised parts and mixed media, dimensions variable
Image courtesy of the artist and Neon Parc, Melbourne

Paul Yore's work is overflowing, with a scatological, 'bower-bird' aesthetic. He uses bright rainbow and fluorescent colours, collage, buttons, and bright and shiny materials. His artworks immediately induce joy and wonder in the viewer, but their fundamentally excessive, chaotic, manic structures also create a feeling of anxiety and disturbance.

Find an article in the Guardian Australia about Paul Yore's work here:

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/australia-culture-blog/2014/jun/03/paul-yore-excess-frenzy-and-violence>

Responding

(address these questions as extended written answers, dot point answers, group discussion or discussion in pairs with reporting back to the group)

- Look closely at *WHEN WILL IT END*. How many different objects can you see? Name them.
- What are the most important art elements in this sculpture?
- How does the artist use movement in this sculpture? Compare it to the way that Boe-lin Bastian uses movement in her work *Jellies*.
- What does the word 'kitsch' mean? Could Paul Yore's work be described that way?
- How does Paul Yore use the aesthetic qualities of his work to make comments about our society?
- Compare Paul Yore's two works, one is more two-dimensional than the other. Do they both affect you in the same way?
- Paul Yore's work seems very chaotic, however it has underlying themes and structures, which give it meaning. Discuss what they might be, conceptually and formally or physically.

Making

- Start a 'bower-bird' collection of things that you are attracted to. Perhaps you could choose a theme as a starting point, or you could simply choose things you like, then examine them to analyse what they have in common, in terms of their formal qualities like colour, scale and shape or conceptual qualities like the ideas or mood they express. How can you turn these objects into an artwork? What materials do you need to provide a structure? What themes, ideas, feelings arise from your collection that will give your work meaning?

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In a recent interview Yore states:

"As a queer artist I'm interested in depicting homoeroticism, and gay politics in my work," says Yore. *"I think in the mainstream media representations of homosexuality, of queer identity, are lacking and I see my work as partly filling in that gap in representation."* (ABC interview 'The Mix' September 2014)

- Discuss how Paul Yore's life experience as a gay man has influenced his artwork.
- Position Paul Yore's practice in a historical and cultural context by comparing it to the work of David McDiarmid and Juan Davila.



Paul Yore, *Ideological Landscape* 2012
Plasticine on wood, 117 x 142 cm
Image courtesy of the artist and Neon Parc, Melbourne

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