



# **52 ACTIONS**

Learning Resource

# 52

*52 ACTIONS* presents works from 52 Australian artists and collectives across generations, geographies and cultural backgrounds. Working in a wide variety of mediums, together they highlight the diversity, complexity and dynamism of contemporary Australian art.

As the title suggests, *52 ACTIONS* is grounded in art as action. The artists explore and reflect on what art is, what it can do within the gallery, and far beyond: art as a political motivator, a cultural transmitter, a means for understanding and a tool for shifting perspectives. It can hold memory, bridge divides and incite change. These ideas are intimately connected with the role of the artist, from facilitator to provocateur, creator to witness.

Guided by the local, the artists' actions speak to critical global concerns including systemic discrimination, climate change, forced migration and colonial legacies. Notions of freedom are ever present, as are First Nations' perspectives, the importance of family and community, and speculations about our shared future.

## PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

EDDIE ABD, ABDUL ABDULLAH, ADRIFT LAB, BROOK ANDREW, APHIDS, ARCHIE BARRY, NATHAN BEARD, NAOMI BLACKLOCK, DIEGO BONETTO, PAT BRASSINGTON, JOHNATHON WORLD PEACE BUSH, CHUN YIN RAINBOW CHAN, ERIN COATES, LILL COLGAN & SAB D'SOUZA, MICHAEL COOK, NICI CUMPSTON, LÉULI ESHRĀGHI, RUHA FIFITA, GUO JIAN, ROCHELLE HALEY, TYZA HART, LARISSA HJORTH, NAOMI HOBSON, JANNAWI DANCE CLAN, KARRABING FILM COLLECTIVE, GILLIAN KAYROOZ, LOREN KRONEMYER, ADAM LINDER, DANI MARTI, PILAR MATA DUPONT, HAYLEY MILLAR BAKER, TV MOORE, RAQUEL ORMELLA, OLC ART COLLECTIVE, HENRI PAPIN (MEIJERS & WALSH), JASON PHU, PATRICIA PICCININI, KENNY PITTOCK, YHONNIE SCARCE, SANCINTYA MOHINI SIMPSON, ROLANDE SOULIERE, STELARC, SHAHMEN SUKU, SĒINI F TAUMOEPEAU, JAMES TYLOR, UNBOUND COLLECTIVE, IVEY WAWN, KAYLENE WHISKEY, MIN WONG, CHRIS YEE, GUTIÑARRA YUNUPIŃU, LOUISE ZHANG



## Origins

52 *ACTIONS* began as an online project, taking place on Instagram and Artspace's website from 2020–21. Over the course of this year, we commissioned 52 artists and collectives across Australia to develop and present new works and share them with audiences online. Each week a different artist or collective drove the project, generating a continuously unfolding archive of creative responses to pertinent social and political issues.

This took place during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, when national and international borders were closed and opportunities for artists and audiences to engage were largely taking place at a physical distance. 52 *ACTIONS* was envisioned as a means to continue to support artists living and working in

Australia, and as a critical platform for artists and audiences to share and connect with one another during this period.

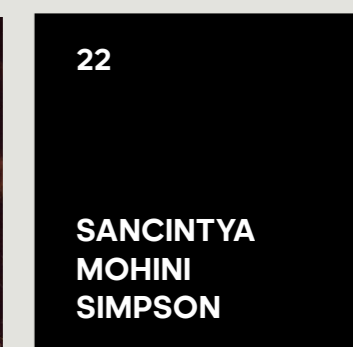
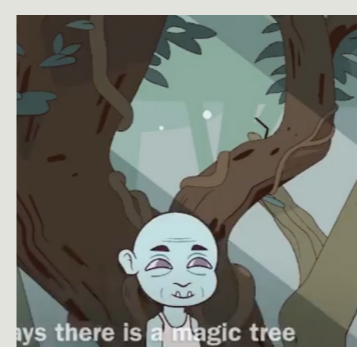
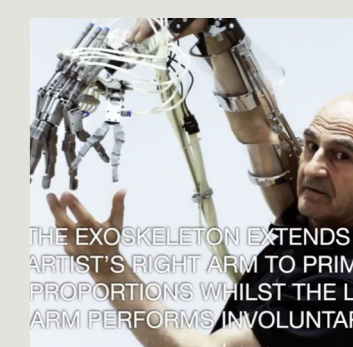
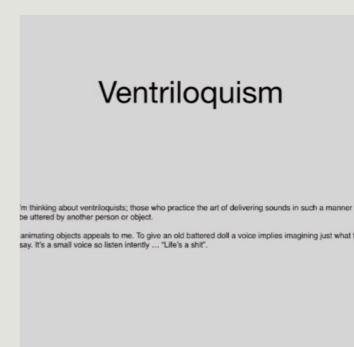
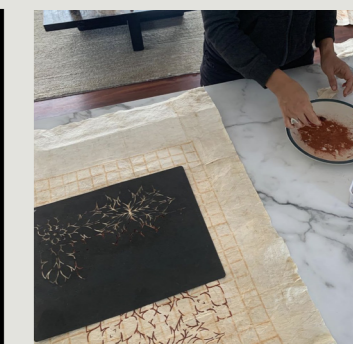
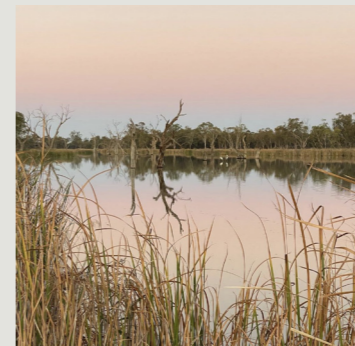
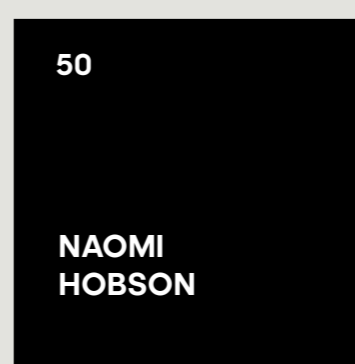
The 52 *ACTIONS* touring exhibition has evolved out of these beginnings, bringing together a selection of the original works plus others in an adaptive exhibition that is responsive to each venue's unique context. This evolving project centres around the social and cultural importance of artistic practice and art as action in times of uncertainty and transformation.

## 52 *ACTIONS* Instagram and Website

Artists and their original actions can be viewed via Instagram and on Artspace's website. Follow the links below and scroll down to the artist you wish to view.

Instagram  
<https://www.instagram.com/52artists52actions/>

Website  
<https://www.artspace.org.au/program/52-actions/>





## Artists and Themes

### Environment

Nici Cumpston  
Erin Coates  
Adrift Lab

### Colonial Legacies

Sancintya Mohini Simpson  
Brook Andrew

### Family and Community

James Tylor  
Gutiŋarra Yunupinju  
Ruha Fifita  
Jason Phu

### Personal as Political

Abdul Abdullah  
Pat Brassington

### Shared Futures

Stelarc  
Patricia Piccinini

## Introduction

This resource focuses on 13 artists from 52 *ACTIONS* grouped into five thematic categories: **Environment, Colonial Legacies, Family and Community, Personal as Political, and Shared Futures**. This is for ease of understanding and access for students. However, each artist can potentially be listed under multiple categories. For example, Nici Cumpston's investigation of her local environment and the impacts of climate change is informed by her connection to Country, family and community; Patricia Piccinini's questions about our shared futures are deeply rooted in her personal experience during the 2020 lockdowns in Naarm/Melbourne.

A discussion on interconnectivity can be initiated by teachers as a means to explore connections between groupings and to identify how artists traverse these. Some cross-curricular ideas have been included in the discussion points for each grouping.

Australian Curriculum band descriptors and content descriptors for the resource are included after this introduction, while specific Australian Curriculum general capabilities and cross curriculum priorities are listed at the end of each grouping.

## Australian Curriculum Links

### Visual Arts | Year 9–10 Band Description

**Build** on their awareness of how and why artists, craftspeople and designers realise their ideas through different visual representations, practices, processes and viewpoints

**Research** and analyse the characteristics, qualities, properties and constraints of materials, technologies and processes across a range of forms, styles, practices and viewpoints

**Explore** the influences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and those of the Asia region

**Reflect** on the development of different traditional and contemporary styles and how artists can be identified through the style of their artworks as they explore different forms in visual arts

### Visual Arts | Years 9–10 Content

Conceptualise and develop representations of themes, concepts or subject matter to experiment with their developing personal style, reflecting on the styles of artists, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists

<https://www.scootle.edu.au/ec/search?accContentId=ACAVAM125>

Present ideas for displaying artworks and evaluate displays of artworks

<https://www.scootle.edu.au/ec/search?accContentId=ACAVAM129>



## About Artspace

www.artspace.org.au  
@ArtspaceSydney  
Facebook.com/ArtspaceSydney

**Ever changing, ever challenging**, Artspace is where audiences engage with the artists and the ideas of our times.

Established in 1983, Artspace is an independent, not-for-profit contemporary art space. It is an institution in permanent transformation, with a radically progressive vision to support artists and different modes of cultural production through risk, experimentation and innovation.

As one of the leading institutions for the production and presentation of contemporary art in the Asia-Pacific region, Artspace's curatorial vision is to commission and produce contemporary art, supporting Australian and international artists of all generations, from emerging through to established, to pursue new directions and make their most ambitious work to date. Artspace presents exhibitions and hosts a rent-free studio residency program and is a site of critical thinking and dialogue, in which contemporary art and

culture is contextualised within current socio-political conditions. It has also spearheaded innumerable educational and outreach initiatives through its inter-relational and complementary public programming.

As a public institution, Artspace understands its role as a citizen and a community resource. We are partners for soft diplomacy, education and social service and will continue to develop initiatives that enable the organisation to look outward and build social capital in our communities. Artspace has a sustained focus on local, regional, national and international partnerships, which provides the bedrock for the organisation's artistic program and offers a diversified and generous approach to connecting with audiences. By situating partnerships at the centre of all Artspace's activities, its ambitious collaborations amplify the organisation's capacity to present a collaborative, civic and creative platform from Woolloomooloo to the Asia-Pacific and beyond.



# Activity

Before reading the resource, look at the works of the 13 artists in the exhibition as well as their contributions to the [52 ACTIONS Instagram feed](#). Write their names in a cloud on a board or wall (or use example below). Now write down the theme headings used in this resource: Environment, Colonial Legacies, Family and Community, Personal as Political and Shared Futures.

- ▶ Draw lines between the artists and the themes their work could be categorised under
- ▶ Now draw lines between artists that have shared ideas in their practice
- ▶ What other links can you find between the artists and the themes? Are there themes missing that should be included?
- ▶ Which other artists or artworks in 52 ACTIONS also engage with the themes chosen for the 52 ACTIONS Learning Resource?

Gutiñarra Yunupiñu

Brook Andrew

Patricia Piccinini

Sancintya Mohini Simpson

Pat Brassington

Erin Coates

Environment

Colonial Legacies

Family and Community

Personal as Political

Shared Futures

Adrift Lab

James Tylor

Stelarc

Jason Phu

Ruha Fifita

Abdul Abdullah

Nici Cumpston







# Environment

The **environment**, its protection, and changes due to human interventions are explored in the work of the following artists. Their works highlight the impacts of **colonial** land management practices and technological advancement on the environment, while also considering some of the fears and misconceptions humans may hold about nature.

Erin Coates, *Zoonosis*, 2020, (detail), silicone and oyster shells, 68 x 20 x 4 cm. Courtesy the artist

## Artists' Actions

**Nici Cumpston** is a Barkandji artist, writer and curator. Her action shares her family's ancestral knowledge of the Barka (Darling River) and raises awareness of the environmental damage **colonial** water management practices have had on this important waterway.

**Erin Coates** is a Boorloo/Perth-based artist working across drawing, sculpture and film. Her action focuses on the Derbarl Yerrigan (Swan River), where she freedives and documents its changing ecology.

**Adrift Lab** is an interdisciplinary group of Australian and international scientists that investigate the **ecological** impacts of plastic pollution on our environment. Their action takes the form of a visual diary describing our increasing reliance on plastic, and how science has been interwoven with this over the past century.

## Talking Points

Sustainable patterns of living rely on the interdependence of healthy social, economic and ecological systems

World views are formed by experiences at personal, local, national and global levels, and are linked to individual and community actions for sustainability

Resistance and survival of First Nations people, culture and knowledge despite the violence of colonisation and the degradation of the environment



# Nici Cumpston

'One way we can nurture the rivers is to humanise them, so they can be empowered to have rights that protect them from harmful human intervention. The portraits of the waterways, including the rivers, the lakes, and the trees, are created as a point of discussion.

My ongoing work is about raising awareness and recognition for our Darling Barka, and our responsibility to care for its ongoing health and wellbeing.'

## Discussion

- ▶ How does Nici Cumpston humanise the rivers and the environment she photographs? Consider her technique and artistic approach, the way she speaks about her work in her artist statement and her artist interview on the following page, and the title of the work, *Oh My Murray Darling*.
- ▶ Look closely at *Oh My Murray Darling*. On first glance, do you notice that the Rorschach technique has been used to create a mirror image? What effect does altering the photograph in this way have on the way that you experience the work?



## INTERVIEW

# NICI CUMPSTON

### Please describe your work in the 52 ACTIONS exhibition.

My work is titled *Oh my Murray Darling*, it was created at Lake Bonney which is situated in the Riverland of South Australia, alongside the township of Barmera. The First Peoples of the River Murray and the Mallee Region include the Erawirung, Ngawait, Nganguruku, Ngintait, Ngarkat and Ngaiawang people. They are the traditional custodians of this region and in 2014, they introduced a dual name for the lake incorporating the name Barmera, meaning 'place of large water.'

This has been a real breakthrough for the First Peoples of the River Murray and Mallee Region and it's wonderful to now have a dual name for this beautiful lake that many people come to for that opportunity to relax; there are also traditional owners who come to this lake to go fishing, to look at the plants; [and] take the plants and to use them for medicinal purposes. There are also many, many scar trees and incredible sights along this lake that, to date, haven't been recognised or respected – so this dual naming of the lake means a lot to the local people in the region.

Fed from the River Murray, it is one of only three permanent freshwater lakes in South Australia. The title *Oh my Murray Darling* is a play on words and a lament to the state of the environment in the Murray-Darling Basin.

*Oh my Murray Darling* is a Rorschach image that is created from a colour negative. The photograph was taken very early in the morning and the image itself contains a little bird flying

past, a few ripples in the water and the beautiful reflections of the sky you get from the lake when the water is quite still. I had the negative scanned and then flipped it in Photoshop so that could really emphasise the clouds and the majesty of the water and the amount of space. When you are out there in the landscape you feel that the sky just keeps going. It is one of those beautiful places for contemplation. There is so much knowledge held within this particular cultural site that I thought was a way to showcase how vast but also incredibly beautiful this country is.

The light that morning was lighting up the trunks of these trees. These trees are dead but they're still full of life. You can see birds' nests and fish that live and swim all around the roots of the trees underwater. It's an image that I think has a lot of playfulness to it. The trees are dead because the flow of water into this lake was changed when they put the locks and the weirs in for irrigation in the early 1900s. The lake became much bigger than it was originally. Where these trees are is the original waterline of the lake – so it has flooded since that time.



There was a drought that lasted for more than ten years, where there were problems with the water coming into the river systems so they stopped the flow of freshwater into the lake, and so the water receded back to the original waterline. During which time I did a series of work because I could walk around the original shoreline and I could see really obvious signs of Aboriginal occupation. I always think about that when I go back to the lake now that there is water back in the lake. I remember those beautiful sites and places I was able to walk around which you can now only access by a boat.

**52 ACTIONS began as an online project that surveyed Australian art practices during the lockdowns of 2020-21. This was at a time of much uncertainty and change. On reflection, did your work respond to any particular moment, feeling or reaction to what was happening at the time?**

52 ACTIONS was an incredibly wonderful opportunity as an online project to be able to work with Artspace on a way to be able to reflect on ideas that I have around my own family and our connections. I am a Barkandji person; we are the people of the Barka – which since colonisation has been known as the Darling River in far western New South Wales. My ongoing work is about raising awareness and recognition for our Darling Barka, and our responsibility to care for its ongoing health and wellbeing.

The Barka and the River Murray are the two major rivers that interconnect a multitude of tributaries and lakes known as the Murray-Darling Basin. The two rivers meet at Wentworth and the converging flows bring the waters from the Barka down the River where it flows out to the sea at

Kumarangk, which is the Ngarrindjeri name for the Murray mouth near Goolwa in South Australia.

This area produces one third of Australia's food. It is Australia's most important water catchment, covering 1 million square kilometres and is the cultural responsibility of forty different First Nations peoples. Barkandji people have travelled to meet and exchange knowledge and goods with other First Nations peoples along these waterways for millennia. The evidence of these gatherings is seen in the middens that hold the remnants of the cooking and consumption of food including charcoal, shells and bones.

**'Action' was a broad provocation or invitation to think about what art is and what it can do. How did you approach the idea of an action for this project?**

I have been documenting our waterways for many years and this was a great opportunity to collate images and texts to share my concern and actions I take to raise awareness.

The Barka, along with its lakes and tributaries, are in a state of crisis – and we need to speak up and protect them. There are many factors contributing to this, including the commodification of water, transforming it into an object of trade, the over-allocation of water to certain individuals and companies, lack of allocation for environmental flows to sustain life, climate change, and most infuriatingly, corruption and greed. I think that this is a way we are all able to understand and learn about what is happening in far western New South Wales and an opportunity to be able to do something about it.



**How did you get into photography?**

Initially it was through my Dad. He was a radiographer and he always set up darkrooms in the houses that we lived in. I used to play around with his cameras, and he let me borrow one once when I was on a school trip and then I started working on the school newspaper. Then when I was travelling around Australia, I ended up studying at a night school in Alice Springs and I started to learn properly how to use my camera and develop film. When I came back from travelling around I wasn't sure what to do. I was in nursing and I just wanted a change and my Mum suggested that I go to art school. In 1987 when I was in my early twenties, I went to art school and I discovered the world of art and the history of art and I never looked back. It has been such a wonderful journey to be on. I love it – absolutely love it.

**What inspires you to make art? What is the role of the artist today, and why is art important?**

I love spending time in the bush, walking the backwaters in the tracks of my ancestors, looking, listening, and feeling the energy of our Country. I walk slowly and create photographic images that give reverence to our precious waterways and share stories of Aboriginal occupation and ongoing survival on our land.

One way we can nurture the rivers is to humanise them, so they can be empowered to have rights that protect them from harmful human intervention. The portraits of the waterways, including the rivers, the lakes, and the trees, are created as a point of discussion.

Through creating works of art, I am honouring my personal responsibility to care for and nurture our precious waterways and all that live and breathe





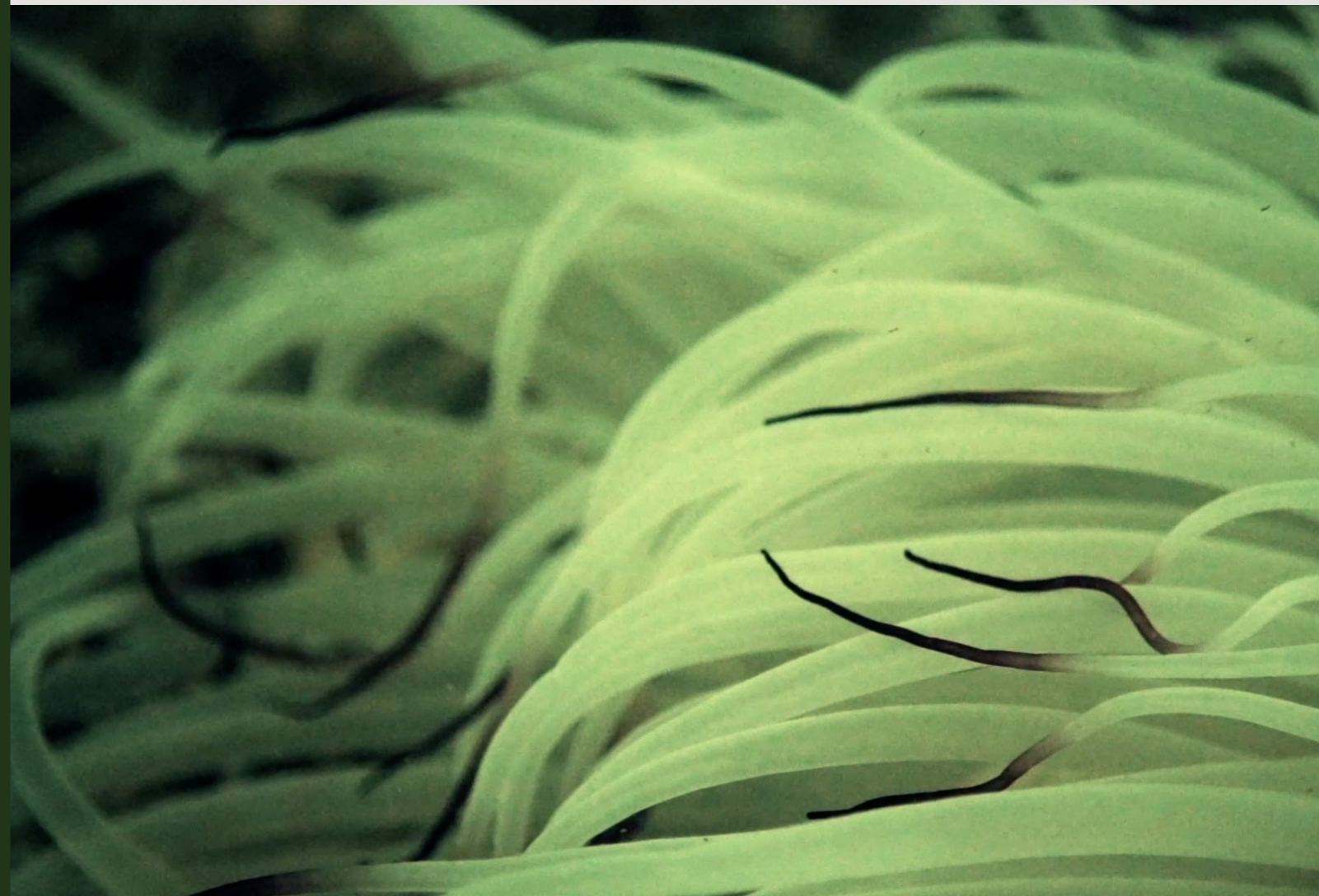
# Erin Coates

'These actions uncover monsters in the river: these are monsters of ecological change, and like all monsters they are ultimately a reflection of our own fears and deeds.'

My interest in the monstrous was sparked by early colonial stories from the eighteenth century of a 'growling monster' in the water, which turned out to be the native Mullet fish. My action aims to invert this colonial fear and misunderstanding of Indigenous fauna, transforming the monstrous into an anthropogenic creation.'

## Discussion

- ▶ Erin Coates explores ecological change through the idea of the monstrous, employing sculptural techniques that are often used in the creation of props for horror films. Her sculpture *Zoonosis* combines the human and the non-human – oyster shells are enfolded in silicone, which has been made to look like skin. What does this new monstrous form suggest about humanity's role in the changing environment?
- ▶ The drawings from Coates' series *Swan River Dolphin Bones* similarly combine images of a dolphin's real anatomy with the molecular structure of heavy metal contaminants, drawn as if they were real specimens. Consider how the mixing of natural elements not usually seen together can bring environmental issues to light. Are these hybrid images more or less effective than a photograph of contaminated dolphin bones?



# Adrift Lab

'...plastics had become inexpensive and **ubiquitous** in our daily lives, transforming society into one that focused on 'throwaway living' and increased convenience.

Though evidence of the **detrimental** impacts of plastic on our environment — and even human health — has increased substantially, plastic production accelerates, outpacing positive behavioural and policy change.'

## Discussion

- ▶ Watch Adrift Lab's video in the Screening Program as part of the exhibition or on their *52 ACTIONS* Instagram post from 20 May 2021. In this they refer to two viral events that they believe created worldwide action to protect the environment. Discuss as a group whether you had seen the image and video they refer to before now. Are there other images or videos which have had a similar or greater impact in relation to your environmental awareness?
- ▶ Adrift Lab is a collective that consists of Australian and international scientists who investigate the impacts of plastic pollution on our environment. How is presenting their research in an art context different from giving a lecture at a university or publishing an essay in an academic journal? Who has more capability to enact change in our society: an influencer, an artist or a scientist? Why?



This image is often credited with sparking  
**The Environmental Movement**



## INTERVIEW WITH DR. JENNIFER LAVERS

# ADRIFT LAB

Please describe your work in the *52 ACTIONS* exhibition.

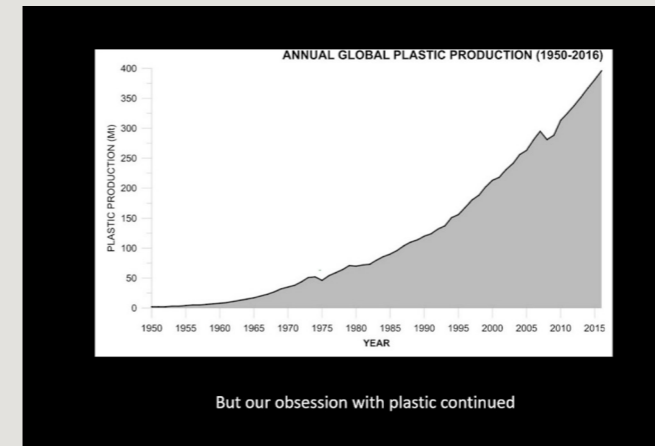
Adrift Lab was fortunate to contribute to *52 ACTIONS* last year and the main focus of our work is in marine pollution and even more so in plastic pollution space. We aim to really communicate the duration that we've been experiencing this issue as a society and the pace of change. So we started off with kind of a historical context of looking at where our plastic addiction began and how our consumption patterns have changed over time, and how we've latched onto this word "convenience." And then we demonstrated how that pace of plastic consumption and waste accumulation in the environment has been extremely rapid through showcasing the impact on islands, impact on marine species and making some comments about the way that we think things can go and do better in the future.

***52 ACTIONS* began as an online project that surveyed Australian art practices during the lockdowns of 2020-21. This was a time of much uncertainty and change. On reflection, did the work that you made respond to any moment in time, feeling or reaction to what was happening at that moment?**

I don't think initially that was the plan. But certainly, in many ways, I suppose that's kind of the legacy of so many things that happened that year. From the perspective of the fact that *52 ACTIONS* was fully online, that just reflects everything about our lives, for the last two and a half years. It's just really, really indicative of how we've learned to navigate and engage. So that's true for us, for Adrift Lab. We were so accustomed to being able to do education and outreach including art/science, collaborations

in person. And so doing it in an online forum was really new to us. In addition, talking about the plastics issue – it's something that we do all the time, but all of a sudden there was this absolute flurry of PPE, plastic based consumer items that were just being used at record pace. Everything from RAT tests through to gloves and masks and also at this exact same time a transition away from reusables (thankfully, it was temporary). So all of a sudden people were quite nervous of reusable plastic bags, and plastic cups. And so when I think back about it, it's all kind of a little bit poignant and timely.

*52 ACTIONS* and our involvement that year was so timely in other ways, too. Because everyone was in lockdown, and there was so much unhappiness and uncertainty. How are we going to do things moving forward, what was online going to look like, and how long was it going to last for? A lot of the Lab, particularly our young junior members, were feeling really deflated. Their kind of education experience and their time in the lab wasn't quite what others before them had experienced. They weren't getting to go out into the field because the world was in lockdown. They weren't getting to do those art/science collaborations and meet amazing people to help them raise their own profiles; but also the profile of the environmental issues that they were working on. And then along came *52 ACTIONS*, which gave the students an opportunity to showcase their creative side, and to engage, and do education and outreach and all of those things that they so desperately wanted to do. There just wasn't a lot of opportunity at that time. So I think it did a lot for their mental health and soothing their soul.



**'Action' was a broad provocation or invitation to think about what art is and what it can do – and in your case, both art and science. How did you approach the idea of action for this project?**

We approached the action idea from the perspective of hope. That we could help people understand the pace of change and how even just our everyday language, the terms that we use day-to-day and to define things; it matters. It gets into our psyche. So we demonstrated just how quickly our addiction to plastics had taken place and taken hold of our lives, and we intentionally use that word: addiction. We also intentionally called on the word "convenience," and tried to kind of show how that's in complete opposition to the impacts that plastic is having on their global environment.

**What inspires you to make art? What is the role of the artist today? And why is it important?**

Adrift Lab is inspired to engage in the art/science process because, well, science can be a lot of fun, and being a scientist is an amazing opportunity. Sometimes when we create outputs (we write reports and papers and things) they can actually be a little bit technical, and therefore hard to understand. They can also be difficult for the broader community to access; they're often behind something we call paywalls. Meaning; there's amazing data and science out there; you just can't get to it. As scientists, that's constantly frustrating and disappointing – so, what we'd like to do is engage in more of a creative artistic process that allows people the opportunity to engage with the data, and the knowledge, and those outputs in a much more immersive way. So you feel like you can walk up to something and maybe touch it and interact with it. It's maybe a photo that allows you to gaze upon something and think about how that relates to your own experience, the types of plastic you might use at home, or at work, and those kinds of things where it's more engaging, sometimes less confronting, and takes people along on a journey.



## Activity

- ▷ Each of the artists highlighted under the theme of Environment call our attention to an aspect of environmental degradation on a local or international level. They have each used photographs of a location combined with images of people, archival texts, drawings or sculptural objects to highlight the interdependence of social and ecological systems to create impact and raise awareness.

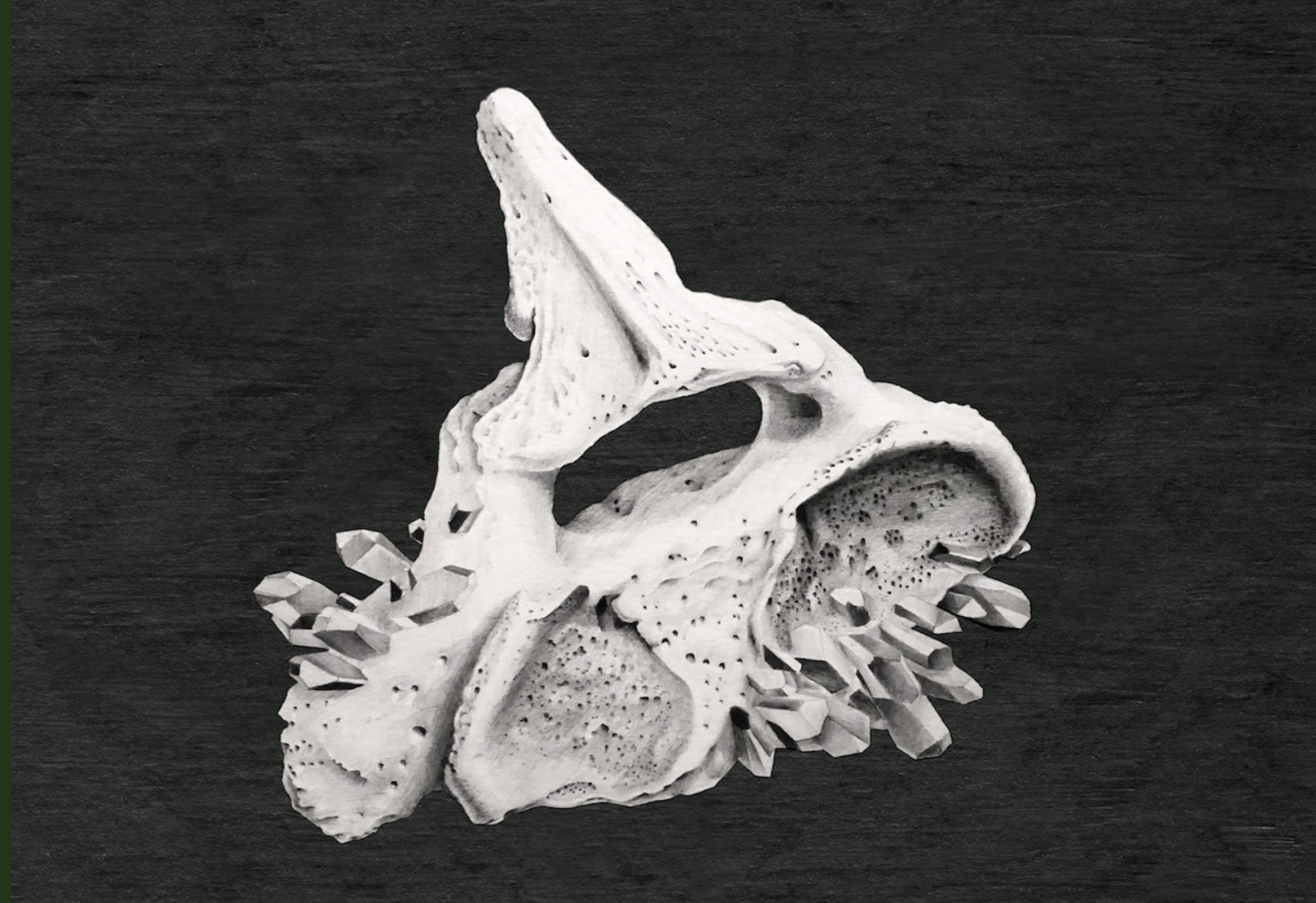
Consider a site of environmental concern in your local area.

Create a photo essay of 5-10 images incorporating photographs of the site alongside other materials of your choice to increase the impact of your storytelling as the artists in *52 ACTIONS* have done.

Share your photo essays with your class. As a group, discuss which ones have the most impact and why. Which would you share or like? Which would activate you to change your habits to help the situation?

Australian Curriculum  
General Capabilities (ACARA, 2017)  
Critical and Creative Thinking  
Literacy  
ICT  
Ethical Understanding  
Personal and Social Capability  
Intercultural Understanding

Australian Curriculum  
Cross Curriculum Priorities (ACARA 2017)  
Sustainability  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories  
and Culture







# Colonial Legacies

**Colonial Legacies** refers to the ongoing impact and violence of colonisation both in Australia and globally. These artists draw from personal and public archival material and memory to reframe selected issues and histories, opening space for retelling and rethinking to occur.

## Artists' Actions

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson** is an artist whose work navigates the complexities of migration, memory and trauma through addressing gaps and silences within the **colonial archive**. Her action *karambu* shares her ongoing research into her family history as a descendant of Indian **indentured** labourers sent to work on sugar plantations in Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa).

**Brook Andrew** is a Wiradjuri/Celtic artist whose **interdisciplinary** practice critically examines dominant narratives related to global histories of colonialism and modernity. His action shares the outcomes of frantic cutting and pasting, smashing together **disparate** elements of printed matter in a method of editorial **montage**.

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## Talking Points

Resistance and survival of First Nations people, culture and knowledge despite the violence of colonisation

Ongoing colonial impact due to political, economic and social structures being shaped by colonialism

The combination of **multimodal** information including multimedia, text and imagery can enhance and layer meaning

The purpose and structure of text created for differing audiences, media and time periods



# Sancintya Mohini Simpson

'*karambu* takes form as a counter-archive, moving away from colonial representations of this history towards a consideration of culturally specific frameworks, oral traditions and the intangible. This work is made of sounds, words and images that offer space for these histories.'

## Discussion

- ▶ For *52 ACTIONS*, Sancintya Mohini Simpson presents complex political and personal ideas across a series of images with a soundtrack and minimal text. Watch *karambu* in the Screening Program as part of the exhibition or on the artist's *52 ACTIONS* Instagram posts starting 12 October 2020. How does she attempt to convey her message within this specific format? Is she successful? How?
- ▶ Simpson speaks about reframing the colonial archive by changing perspective. How do her choices in editing and sound help to achieve this? Try watching her posts with the sound off and then on. How does their impact change?



karambu / gannā / cut

slit / kūlī-kare / slash



# Brook Andrew

'I wanted to reveal the repetitive nature of human involvement in environmental and inter-human conflict since industrialisation to our current moment of ongoing colonialism...The works suggest that little human learning concerning the protection of the environment and humankind seems to have greatly evolved.'

## Discussion

- ▶ Look closely at Brook Andrew's *This year, with Blak girl magic...* and read his artist statement on the wall label. What are some of the specific issues connected to colonialism that he raises? Why do you think he chooses to work with such a variety of printed materials?
- ▶ Does the artist's choice of images and text give insight into his opinion on these issues?
- ▶ The work breaks out of a traditional framing format, with an unusually-shaped yellow box frame lined with blue neon. What do the neon and bright colours remind you of? How do these elements change your experience of the collage?





## Activity

- ▷ Choose an issue of social and/or environmental importance to you. Gather a selection of printed material such as magazines, newspapers, comics, print-outs and photographs. Create a collage that communicates your views on this issue. Then try creating a collage that shares an alternate viewpoint on the same issue. Which collage was more successful? Why?
- ▷ Consider what sound score could accompany your collages. From the sounds you can make and record around you, record a short sound bite to display with your collage. As a class, display your collages and spend time looking at each work. Then play the sound recordings while your classmates are looking at your collage. Discuss the impact of the collage alone and then the impact of the collage with sound.

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
Histories and Culture  
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## Artists' actions

**James Tylor's** multidisciplinary practice explores present day issues surrounding cultural identity and the environment through the perspectives of his multicultural heritage that comprises Nunga (Kaurua Miyurna), Māori (Te Arawa) and European (English, Scottish, Irish, Dutch and Norwegian) ancestry. His action includes a series of contemporary recipes created using ingredients from the environment of the Kaurua/Yarta nation.

**Gutiŋarra Yunupiŋu** has been deaf since birth and uses barrkunju waŋa (language from a distance), Yolŋu sign language. His video work *Gutiŋarra Djalkiri* (Gutiŋarra's Journey) depicts his homeland Buymarr in East Arnhem Land, and includes interviews with his family and teachers about how his connection to Country helped him learn to communicate. His work tests the possibilities of non-verbal communication in examining and representing self and culture.

**Ruha Fifita** is an interdisciplinary artist who was born and raised in the Island Kingdom of Tonga. She works closely with her siblings and extended family, developing a practice that focuses on collaboration, community engagement and connection with indigenous methods and materials. *OFO HAKE Phase II – Ngoue Manongi study* is a design study for a new ngatu (painted barkcloth) design, which will be created with extended family and intended for family ceremonies.

**Jason Phu** works across installation, painting and performance. For his action he shares his contemporary re-workings of the Gong An he grew up with. In the Chan Buddhist tradition, Gong An are historical records that take the form of short stories detailing an encounter between a master and student. They are used by monks as moral lessons and often employ the use of **absurdity** and contradiction.

## Talking points

# Family and Community

The artists gathered under the theme **Family and Community** remind us of the importance of ancestors, stories and traditions and how those practices and ideas are shared with us. Their work displays respect for the past while adding their own contemporary voice to their family histories. This shows us that culture and tradition are not stagnant concepts, but rather evolve as we and the community around us change.

The contribution positive relationships make to individual, group, family and community wellbeing

Traditional culture being re-examined and re-envisioned by contemporary voices

Development of different traditional and contemporary styles and how artists can be identified through the style of their artwork

Cultural representations of family



# James Tylor

'This project explores developing a new Kurna Miyurna cuisine called "Mai" using Indigenous and non-Indigenous foods to tell our rich and unique history within Australia...a series of recipes that highlights the Kurna Yarta nation's unique history, culture, environments and ecosystems of the Adelaide plains in South Australia.

Over the past few years, I have incorporated food into my art practice more and more because I like to give people an immersive experience into art and culture through eating foods with Australian Indigenous ingredients.'

## Discussion

- ▶ Read one of James Tylor's recipes closely. Note the combination of familiar aspects (such as the recipe format, layout and image style) and the potentially unfamiliar aspects (language, ingredients). Why do you think Tylor has introduced these recipes in this format? How might this differ from more traditional ways of sharing recipes?
- ▶ James Tylor's photographs depict various Indigenous food plants in the environments they were gathered in. What does the inclusion of the hand in each of these images add to your interpretation of the work? Do these photographs change the way you view the recipes?





**Tarnta Wama  
(Southern Plains)**

Kangaroo fillet seasoned with bush tomato, indigenous thyme, indigenous basil, sea salt, mountain pepper, grey saltbush on a bed of grey and old man saltbush, quandong jam served in a maramurdumurdu (wholemeal wheat flatbread).



**INGREDIENTS**

- Kangaroo 1 large fillet
- Indigenous basil 1tsp
- Indigenous thyme 1tsp
- Bush tomato 1/2 ground powder
- Ground mountain pepper 1 tsp
- Ground mountain leaves 1 tsp
- Murray River salt 1/2 tsp
- Grey saltbush leaves 1 cup
- Oldman saltbush leaves 1 cup
- Quandong jam 4 tbsp
- Macadamia oil 2 tbsp
- Maramurdumurdu (flatbread) qty 4

**EQUIPMENT**

- Kampa kurru (saucepan)
- Kurru (bowl)
- Tadli tadli (frying pan)
- Pakipakiti (knife)
- Tarayle (chopping board)
- Karnkarnkati (spoon)
- Pardupamamati (fork or strainer)

**JAMES TYLOR**



**MARAMURDUMURDU:  
WHOLEMEAL FLATBREAD**



**INGREDIENTS**

- Murdumurdu (wholemeal wheat flour) 1 cup
- Murdumurdu (white wheat flour) 1 cup
- Kauwi (water) 2 cups

**EQUIPMENT**

- Kampa kurru (saucepan)
- Kurru (bowl)
- Kurruru mai (15cm circle biscuit cutter)
- Wirri mai (rolling pin)
- Tarralyi (kitchen bench or chopping board)
- Tadli tadli (frying pan)

**JAMES TYLOR**

Maramurdumurdu is a unique style of johnnycake flatbread made from wholemeal flour. The name maramurdumurdu translates to 'hand bread', 'mara' meaning hand and murdumurdu 'bread' because the johnnycake is the size of your hand and is held like a taco in your palm when you eat it. The maramurdumurdu is made by mixing boiling hot water and wholemeal flour together to create a soft dough. The dough is rolled flat with a unique rolling pin called wirri mai that is purposely designed for making the maramurdumurdu. The flattened dough is embossed with a unique zigzag design with the handle of the wirri mai. The maramurdumurdu is cut to size in a circle shape with the kurruru mai (biscuit cutter). The johnnycake is cooked on both sides on a flat hot cooking surface. Finally, maramurdumurdu is filled with a regional selection of mai (vegetables) and pardu (meat).



James Tylor, (left) recipe card and (above) a selection of photographs from *Mai: Kurna Contemporary Food*, 2020-22. Courtesy the artist



# Gutiŋarra Yunupiŋu

‘When I was a little boy I lived with my family in Buymarr, which is a beautiful peaceful homeland on the beach approximately 100kms from Yirrkala. It was here that my family taught me about the land and the sea and how to hunt, gather and prepare food...I love it there.’

## Discussion

- ▶ Watch *Gutiŋarra Djalkiri* in the Screening Program, which includes interviews with Yunupiŋu’s family and teachers on how his connection to Country helped him learn to communicate. You can also look through the images Yunupiŋu posted on Instagram of his homeland.
- ▶ Consider the senses that these images connect with. Can you identify images that connect you with each of the five senses? Spend a moment considering how these images make you feel when you concentrate on the senses they invoke.
- ▶ Do you have a memory of family, community or place that makes you feel peaceful? Write down the five senses and what aspect of the memory relates to each sense.





# Ruha Fifita

'Our experiences together have taught us that who we are and who we can potentially become in the world is deeply connected to the sense of purpose, values, and dynamics that characterise relationships and interactions within one's family and extended family as a distinct social space.

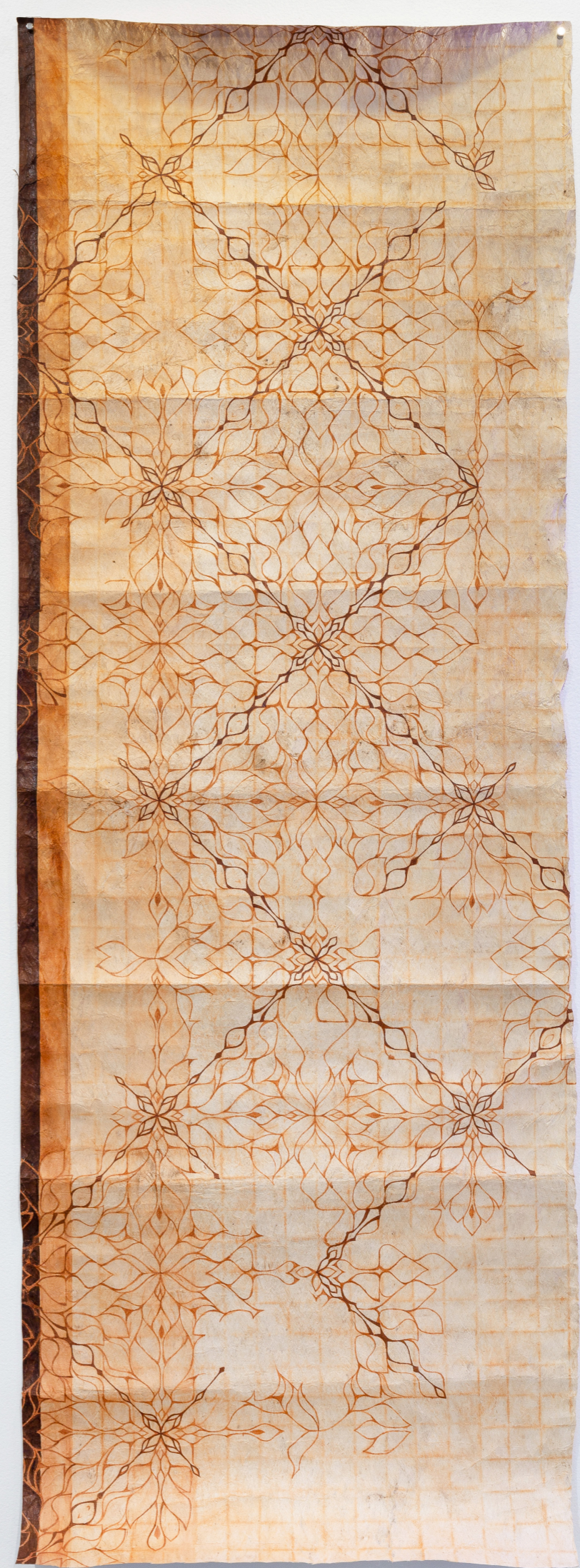
Our grandparents' lives and words have taught us to...honour the interdependence of all things and to see ourselves as co-creators of the culture and communities we are a part of.'

## Discussion

- ▶ Ruha Fifita speaks about weaving together familiar aesthetics and experimental techniques and collaborates with family and community in Tonga and Australia, honouring her grandparents' teachings. Do you think it's important for artists to incorporate contemporary or experimental techniques into traditional art making practices? Why?
- ▶ Think about your own network of extended family, friends and community, and the values that you share. What kinds of creative knowledge and practices have been passed on to you? In what ways might you share these with others, whether now or in the future?







Installation view, *52 ACTIONS*, Penrith Regional Gallery, Sydney, 2023. Ruha Filita, *OFO HAKE Phase II – Ngoue Manongi study*, 2022. Installation view, Penrith Regional Gallery, Sydney, 2023. Photos: Jessica Maurer



# Jason Phu

'I have created several of these stories (Gong An) to better reflect issues in our contemporary life, they are a sort of anti-folktale that also address some of the fallacies of old folktales...I am using animation as a vehicle because I feel it is the most accessible form of information consumption today.'

## Discussion

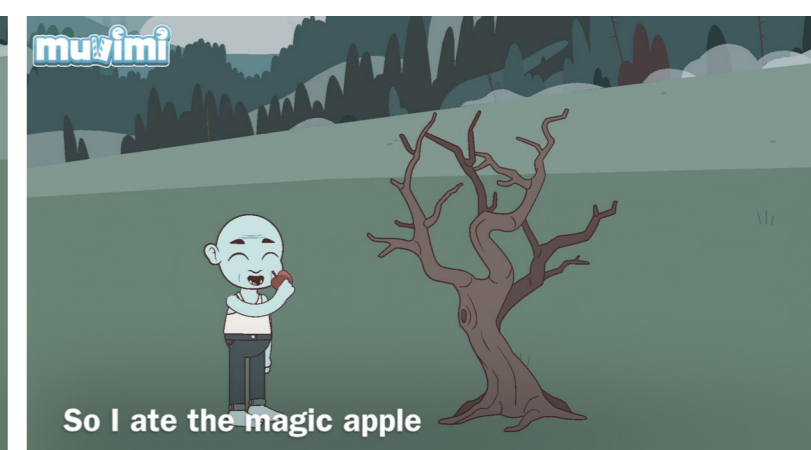
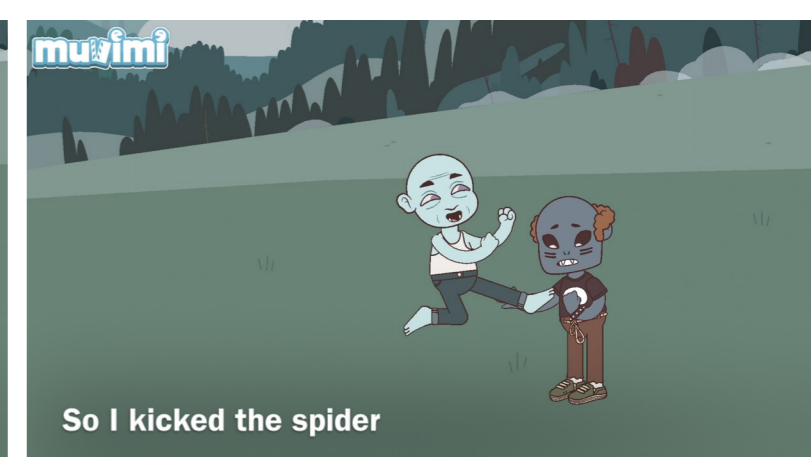
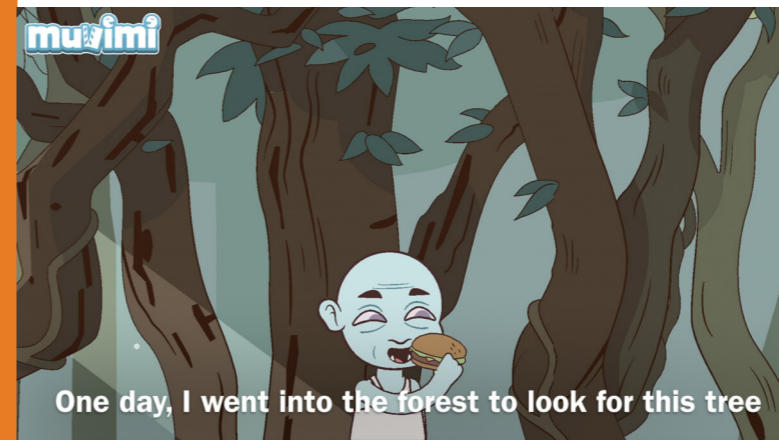
- ▶ What are some of the stories you've grown up with? Do they stem from specific cultures? Discuss the various cultures you have engaged with or been introduced to through storytelling (including oral stories, books, movies, music, social media and online).





## Activity

- Each of the artists highlighted in Family and Community have drawn on diverse art making styles to share their unique experiences of family and culture. Choose an aspect of your family life you would like to share, such as cooking, playing sport or games, learning together, making or storytelling. Create a stop motion story using a notepad and pen or one of the apps that Jason Phu uses (Toontastic, Stop Motion, Plotagon, Muvimi or Folioscope). Using your stop motion story as a jumping off point, share your experiences of family and community with your class.



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# Personal as Political

Artists have shared private spaces in their art making throughout history to powerful effect. Giving audiences insight into people's lives and experiences creates opportunities for encounter, empathy and understanding. In contemporary culture, social media has developed as an alternate mouthpiece to mainstream media, increasing the reach and impact of the individual.

Abdul Abdullah, *Urgency*, from *Momentos*, 2020, (detail), photograph, 24 x 24 cm. Courtesy the artist and Yavuz Gallery, Sydney and Singapore

## Artists' Actions

As a self-described 'outsider amongst outsiders', **Abdul Abdullah**'s practice is primarily concerned with the experience of the 'other' in society. Abdullah's practice has engaged with different **marginalised** minority groups with a specific interest in the experience of young Muslims in the contemporary multicultural Australian context. His action documents several of his text-based tattoos, pairing each with a short piece of writing about how they serve as personal reminders of his political principles.

**Pat Brassington** is a pioneering artist, now in her eighties, whose practice draws on ideas from **psychoanalysis**, feminism and surrealism, producing visually and psychologically intriguing work. Her action combines a text she wrote in 2011 about individual agency with images from her **oeuvre**.

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## Talking Points

Diverse ways of knowing and being

Examination of how diversity and gender are represented in the media and communities, and the influence these representations have on individuals and their identities

Segregation and exclusion of people belonging to particular cultural or ethnic backgrounds

Changing definitions of women's rights and feminism alongside ongoing inequalities



# Abdul Abdullah

'There was a matter of practicality to my project, using what was at hand, which were my actual hands to start off with...Despite the limitations at the time, I still wanted to work within the digital framework. So that my body became a platform to communicate some of these ideas.

Art separates us from what would otherwise be a very boring existence.'

## Discussion

- ▶ Read Abdul Abdullah's artist interview on the following page, where he speaks about the restrictions he experienced during the making of this work, the decision-making process and the political **imperative** in his practice. By documenting himself, the audience gains an insight into his personal story. What can we learn about his life through the seven photos he shares? What message/s do you think he is communicating through this work?
- ▶ Look up the term, 'The personal is political'. Where does this idea originate from? Is there relevance to this idea and Abdullah's primary concern of the 'other' in society? Why?
- ▶ Research other artists who have documented themselves or their everyday lives, such as Tehching Hsieh, Marina Abramović, Pope.L, Mike Parr and Ann Newmarch. Do you think documenting personal experiences or actions is a successful form of art making? Why? Compare these examples with your experience of social media posts about people's personal lives on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Can you think of examples on social media that relate to the theme **Personal as Political**?





## INTERVIEW

# ABDUL ABDULLAH

**Please describe your work in the 52 ACTIONS exhibition.**

I'm showing a series of images I've taken that are of my body. Each image isolates a different text-based tattoo that I have.

I've got a lot of tattoos and they're largely motivational. People often ask why all my tattoos are upside down, but they're not upside down to me. I've written them so that I can read them. I see them as snapshots from a particular period in time. I haven't regretted any of my tattoos for this reason. I go, that was me in 2020, or that was me in 2018, or that was me in 2002. It's me looking back at particular periods of my life, like a postcard that shows how I approached the world at that time.

For me, tattooing is a form of painting. It's the idea of mark making but the canvas is skin rather than linen or paper. It's still applying a wet medium to a dry surface to create an image that didn't exist before. It's an amazing process.

**52 ACTIONS began as an online project that surveyed Australian art practices during the lockdowns of 2020-21. This was at a time of much uncertainty and change. On reflection, did your work respond to any particular moment, feeling or reaction to what was happening at the time?**

Being one of the initial artists to participate in the 52 ACTIONS online project, and it being right at the beginning of lockdown in 2020, I remember it was a very fraught time. I had just come back from the United States when COVID-19 first hit, and we weren't sure how things were going to move forward in general.

There was a matter of practicality to my project, using what was at hand, which were my actual hands to start off with. Luckily for me I've been getting tattoos for almost 20 years, so this project already existed, I was just documenting it for the first time as part of my practice. Despite the limitations at the time, I still wanted to work within the digital framework. So my body became a platform to communicate some of these ideas.

**'Action' was a broad provocation or invitation to think about what art is and what it can do. How did you approach the idea of an action for this project?**

There are a few ways in which I thought about action. One is, the themes of each of my tattoos, in some ways, is a call to action. It's a personal call for action, largely for me to get off my butt and do something. But even the act of getting a tattoo is taking an action. Having an idea and then committing to it in a way that is going to cause a little bit of pain, but then it's with you permanently. It's taking decisive action.

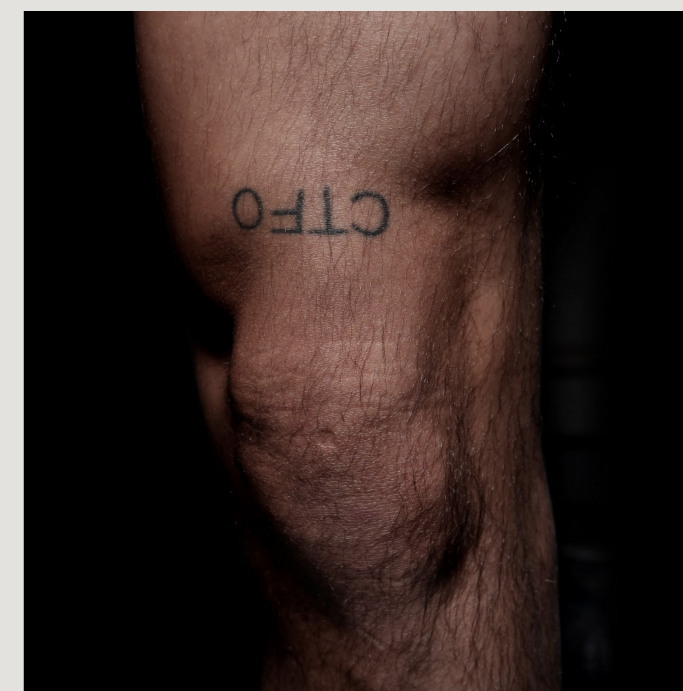
I actually got a stick and poke tattoo and filmed the process as part of my action. The idea of documenting this action was interesting because stick and poke is a much slower process than standard tattooing. It's not just the needle running across the skin but somebody sticking you one poke at a time. It's a very long process, but there's something really meditative about that action too. Even though it's painful, you can take a breath in because you can't do anything else. It's staying still for a long period of time while someone applies consistent, regular pain.

**What inspires you to make art? What is the role of the artist today, and why is art important?**

I think art, and creative practices generally, are massively important and integral to the way that we engage with the world around us. Art separates us from what would otherwise be a very boring existence.

I think art fulfils a similar function to journalism, which is what I studied before art, but it's not burdened by any pretensive objectivity. So I can be as responsive and reactive and emotional as I want, but I'm still conveying a message, communicating an idea or getting the opportunity to be as nosey and as curious as I want. Hopefully audiences are interested in what I've got to say or what I've got to communicate.

For me, art is always political. Now art doesn't have to be political for everybody — and I know lots of artists who don't engage in it that way. But it's how I've approached communicating. All of my works are embedded with a political message or idea that is important to me.





# Pat Brassington

'These true knights of the realm are ventriloquists par excellence, all speaking out of my mouth as if I was some battered doll without a voice of my own.

When I come to think about it, to answer the question "what the world needs now" requires a major act of ventriloquism. My voice just won't carry.'

## Discussion

- ▶ Look at the printed image chosen for the exhibition and read the accompanying text. Who (or what) do you think Pat Brassington is referring to as ventriloquists? Who (or what) do you think they are speaking for?
- ▶ Think about a time when someone else has spoken for you, and when you have spoken for someone else. In each circumstance, what factors lead to one person doing the speaking and the other remaining silent? How did you feel in each circumstance?



## Activity

- ▷ Choose an aspect of your day-to-day activity, such as the food you eat or the clothes you wear, and document them regularly over 7 days. Feel free to come up with something completely different at the same time each day. It's the repetitive action of truthfully documenting an activity which is important, so keep your photos regular – set an alarm if you need to.
- ▷ Try setting up the photos so they are structured in a similar way, such as always from above with no people or hands, or always with your hand displaying how the food is held.
- ▷ Once you have the full documentation of your week, print out the photos and display them in a row or a grid. Share the results with your classmates. What insight does the documentation bring into your friends' lives, cultures, families, homes or routines? Did any aspect of your documentation surprise you once it was laid out for exhibition? Did the documentation highlight things that you ordinarily overlook?
- ▷ Discuss how documentation of the everyday can make us aware of our similarities and differences.

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## Artists' Actions

**Stelarc** is an Australian performance artist who explores alternate anatomical architectures, interrogating issues of **embodiment**, **agency**, identity and the post-human. His action shares documentation of a number of performances that call into question the stability of the body and its changing agency in relation to technological innovations.

**Patricia Piccinini's** practice examines the increasingly **nebulous** boundary between the artificial and the natural as it appears in contemporary culture and ideas. For her action, she produced and pasted up a series of posters at 52 sites in inner Naarm/Melbourne, near where the artist lives and works. These posters **juxtapose** an image and a question and ask viewers to consider them.

# Shared Futures

The future is full of possibilities, depending on the choices we make as a society. Rather than attempting to provide answers to the question of what the future will look like, the artists in **Shared Futures** use their practices to show us extreme potentialities: enticing us to ask questions, to critically consider our reality and to start conversations around our shared futures.

## Talking Points

Predicting the impact of emerging technologies for preferred futures

Comparing action and impact on both a local and global scale

Considering ethics and sustainability in technological developments



# Stelarc

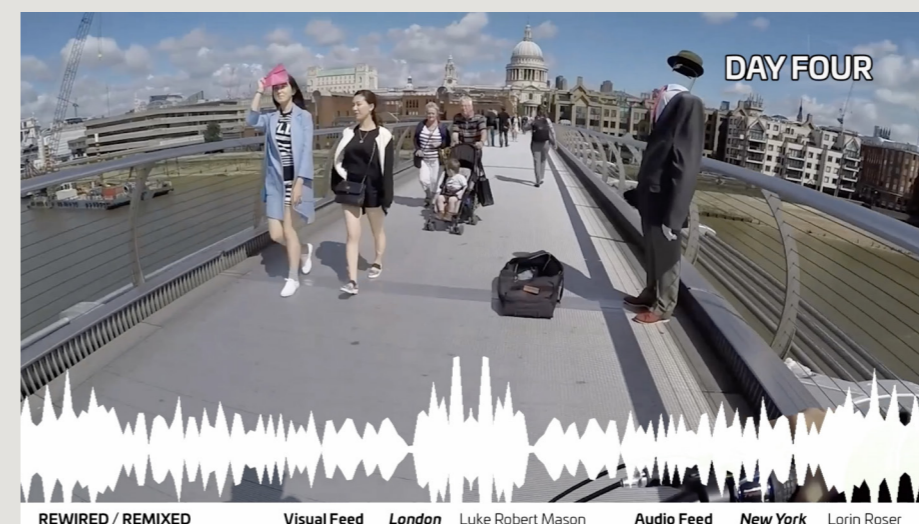
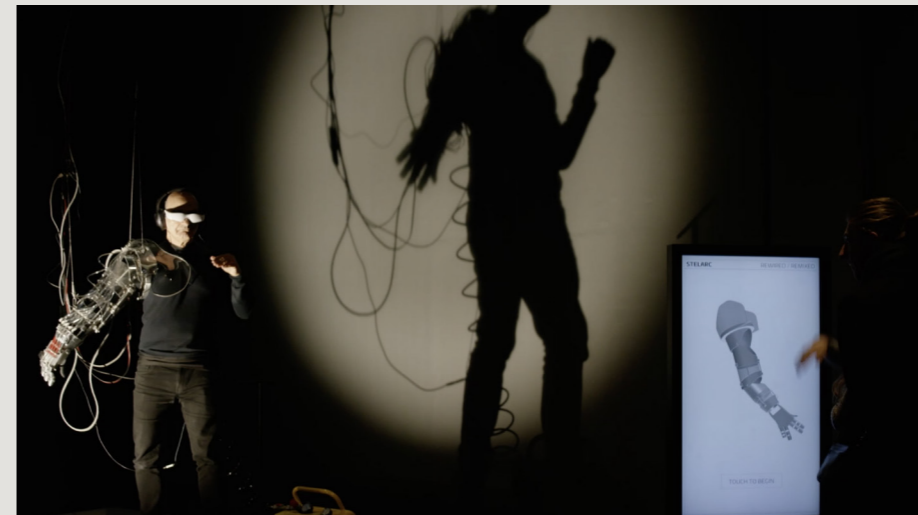
'We are living in an age of excess and indifference and of prosthetic proliferation...The body now experiences parts of itself as automated, involuntary and absent to its own agency. It is profoundly obsolete and empty. The body is now remotely prompted and propelled.

The body has become a contemporary chimera of meat, metal and code.

What artists do best is to generate contingent and contestable possibilities – possibilities that can be experienced, interrogated, evaluated, possibly appropriated but most likely discarded.'

## Discussion

- ▶ Watch *Re-Wired Re-Mixed* in the Screening Program. Stelarc extends his own body through technology, and his extreme renderings invite us to question our acceptance of everyday technological realities. Consider what technologies you use daily to extend the functionality of your own body. Are there technologies that Stelarc incorporates in his performances that you also use or have access to?
- ▶ Consider Stelarc's quote about 'what artists do best'. What is he saying about the role of artists in society and the ways that art can shape our future? Do you agree?





# Patricia Piccinini

'My work has always been around a dichotomy of natural and artificial. That is an ultimate boundary which was cemented around modernism, the Age of Enlightenment, industrialisation and it is this dichotomy that allows us to separate ourselves from things like nature.'

I don't know the answers and I am not the expert in anything but I am an artist, a master communicator and a catalyst for conversations.'

## Discussion

- ▶ Read the artist interview with Patricia Piccinini on the following page. She makes reference to the development of this work during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns in Naarm/Melbourne and associated feelings of isolation, but also a heightened sense of local community. How was the work developed in relation to the restrictions imposed on the artist at that time? How does the juxtaposition of the questions alongside the images influence your reading of the work? Would you respond differently if you were presented with just the text or the images? Discuss.
- ▶ Piccinini's work invites us to consider our role in the world, our relationship to the **more-than-human**, and the future we are creating. Look at her sculpture, *While She Sleeps*. What is your immediate reaction to the work? How does this shift after reading her artist statement?





## INTERVIEW

# PATRICIA PICCININI

### **Please describe your work in the 52 ACTIONS exhibition.**

My project is a series of posters that ask questions of our community: 'Is there room in our hearts?'; 'When do we reconnect?'; 'Is technology the problem or the solution?'; and, probably the most important one, 'How will we look our children in the eye?' These questions are conflated with images of my work.

### **52 ACTIONS began as an online project that surveyed Australian art practices during the lockdowns of 2020-21. This was a time of much uncertainty and change. On reflection, did the work that you made respond to any moment in time, feeling or reaction to what was happening at that moment?**

For me, an action is being in the streets and I was in the streets because we weren't allowed to go to our studios or into the city. I was just walking around my neighbourhood and noticed there was so much space where the bill posters usually are because all the gigs, the concerts, the theatre – everything had been cancelled and nobody was advertising anything. It just seemed like a great space to ask these salient questions and to discuss them with my community.

These questions, in my mind asked – When will this be over and how will we do it? How did we get to this position? Is it going to be a vaccine that is going to help us, or is it actually that technology has enabled us to have these cross-species interactions?

The most important question for me was about looking our children in the eye. I think the people who were most severely impacted by the pandemic were the young because they were kept away from each other at a crucial time. Their education was denied, they were not able to socialise. They really bore the burden of the

impact of our society. I don't think that was really acknowledged and I still think that this will have repercussions in the future. A lot of children are, understandably, disconnected from school. One day it's here, then it's gone. What makes school important? How do we find a new way of educating our young people in a way that makes sense in light of this new environment?

### **In a certain way, your work is about crossing boundaries – or at least blurring boundaries.**

Questioning whether those boundaries are useful – which ones are useful and which ones are not. That is what makes sense in images. My work has always been around a dichotomy of natural and artificial. That is an ultimate boundary which was cemented around modernism, the Age of Enlightenment, industrialisation and it is this dichotomy that allows us to separate ourselves from things like nature. You could say that nature is 'there', and it does not impact us but now it has come back as a virus and it affects all of us. It is these kinds of boundaries my work tries to look at and question which ones are relevant, useful, outdated. We should keep and encourage a discussion around those boundaries.

I don't know the answers and I am not the expert in anything – but I am an artist, a master communicator and a catalyst for conversations. I love people and the discussions around these ethical concerns. As we go on, more practical concerns, because we have to do something about how we are negotiating these distinctions. We have to, because climate crisis is really pushing our hand.

I conflated these really important questions with images of my work. For example, with the one that says, "is there room in our hearts?" we have an image of a transgenic creature, which is a bat and a human. On one level, it's saying "is there

room in our hearts to reconnect to everyone and not be suspicious to get the virus," but also with respect to this image, "how could we connect to difference, to bats and the way we do connect to bats?" Remember, that it was the bats that were eaten that we think the virus came from. If we can connect to bats and realise their value and their intelligence and that they are 'other' from us – but actually, we're all others, we are all different but we're all the same. We are all going together in the same direction and trying to negotiate in the environment together. I think that is how we can get through it – when we recognise the value and importance of other species.

### **Could you talk a little bit about your process of making your sculpture in the exhibition – how the form evolved and how you actually make them?**

*While She Sleeps* is a work about an Australian history – a history of wilfully bringing a species to extinction. When settlers came to Australia, they thought that a thylacine, a beautiful marsupial creature with a backward facing pouch, was eating the sheep. They put a bounty on the heads of these beautiful creatures which were not eating the sheep. They probably ate a carrion, but the people did not think that – thus they put a pound for each creatures' heads. Very quickly, every thylacine (Tasmanian tiger) were killed and the last one died in the zoo, I think in the 1920s.

I was interested in this history. I know we wouldn't wilfully do that now and at the time, people were concerned but did not really understand the repercussions. I wanted to make this work because, still there are people saying that there are sightings of Tasmanian tigers and that they are still alive and we did not kill them to extinction but in fact, they are gone. There are these beautiful altruistic desires to clone them back to

life which begs the question, "is this the way we should go?" How far will we go with technology to undo the damage that we've done to the environment? Should we clone them back to life? Because they are never actually going to be exactly how they were before because the cloned embryo has to be put into another species and a whole new environment. We can't actually go backwards. We can't undo it – it will be something different.

This work draws attention to this narrative and for me, there is a discussion point around it asking "what can we do," or "what should we do?" Also because of pose of it, we see them as nurturing creatures because all creatures necessarily nurture each other, but they also nurture the environment. That's how environments stay healthy and one of the things about being a human is to think "we cause the change, we are going to fix it." But actually we can't fix it by ourselves. That is hubristic because we can't do it by ourselves because mostly the real work is done by other species. We need them and we need to recognise their beauty and intelligence and role in the system and give over some control to them.



**Your works have facial features of human quality. Could you tell us more about this in terms of your process?**

Every pose is really considered a water bath because when we come up to a work, there is a mirroring process. We mirror the emotions that we can see. Especially the works that I make, they are fairly emotional works. What we are witnessing is a kind of caring, nurturing relationship where one creature is caring for another and that in any context is positive. It is how things go forward and that is how people grow and feel safe. That's how anything goes forward. I want to make a work which depicts this kind of emotion and then in the studio we literally get down on the floor, the two of us, often Peter and I, and we kind of do the pose to see what it would look like. With one head on the other creature's leg and what their heads are doing, "are they looking down or looking up?" We want them to have such a connection that they feel them so closely that they don't have to be looking at each other. They can be looking out. The morphology of it, the way the bodies form is really important because we are masters of communication too – so we can read body languages in an instant. We can read instantly what we are seeing. That is what I rely upon is to engage the viewers' empathy. I wanted to do something that brings you in. There is actually a certain push away in that work. Those chimeras are not exact thylacines – they are chimeras of humans and thylacines. So there is an ambiguity in the work of push and pull. In the end, what I hope does happen, is in this push and pull, there is a little internal movement that would in fact draw us in to say "yes, actually, nurture and care is not specific to humans. Other creatures do it too and they do it really well," – and that's evolution. That's life force.

That's the kind of idea that is lacking in the discussion around things like business, politics and certainly around education. How can we nurture people through this pandemic? Silence. Nobody talks about that. How do we look after our young people? – I don't know. We all just wait until it all erupts – it is a ticking time bomb. Until people in their twenties go, "hey, you didn't actually nurture us, so we won't look after you because you were not doing the right things for us. You adults were not doing the right thing." That is the whole Frankenstein story. You don't nurture what you create? The darkness follows where there's no nurture.



**What inspires you to make art, what is the role of the artist today and why is art important?**

Every artist has their own drive to make art. I think I know what mine is. I thought about it after 30 years of making art, "why am I still doing it?" I think that for me it means that I can belong to this community. When I came here as a migrant, I didn't speak English and this was not my culture. I could fit in, but that didn't mean that I belonged. I could pass, but that doesn't mean that you are connected. And as I grew older, I thought, "Is this my place?" And what makes it a place is where you have connections.

The way I personally connect is with art, though art, with people. I make public works like Skywhale which is a real community event, where we all come together at 5 in the morning. I think I make works because they form a kind of opportunity for us to come together and consider things that are happening to all of us. It's not a therapy for me just to be okay with myself – I'm forming these works and chances for us to consider important, often ethical, questions that are brought up by changes in the world.

At the beginning of my practice, I was really interested in how medical innovation changed the way we saw each other, and that was also about natural and artificial. Now I am more interested in and moved into not just medical innovation but also how this dichotomy of nature and artificial affects us in terms of environment. How we relate to environment. I make it because this is a really important question that needs to be addressed for the sake of our children and our future generations. It feels like this is a good space to think about these things because it's open-ended.

I studied economics before I came to art. That's a closed system. There are things you have to assume in the economics that were never challenged until quite recently. Things like "profit is good", "marginal cost vs marginal revenue". But do we have to make profit? Shouldn't we look after people? That's a closed system. But with art, that's an open system. You can include all kinds of people and the responses that come from them are real artwork. That's the art process. It's the artwork and the people and what they make together. That's what's great about art.



## Activity

- ▷ As a class, brainstorm words that come to mind from looking at the work of Stelarc and Patricia Piccinini. Consider the possibilities and ideas they offer in relation to how we interact with our world and our shared future.
- ▷ Write each word on a single post-it note and stick them all on a blank wall. Aim for each person to write 4-5 words each. Discuss the types of words you chose. Are they positive or negative, passive or active?
- ▷ Take it in turns to read aloud 10 random words quickly, like a quick spoken word poetry session. What images come to mind when your friends read out their 'poems'? What possibilities and conversations do they open up? How do they make you feel?

Australian Curriculum  
General Capabilities (ACARA, 2017)  
Critical and Creative Thinking  
Literacy  
ICT  
Ethical Understanding  
Personal and Social Capability  
Intercultural Understanding

Australian Curriculum  
Cross Curriculum Priorities (ACARA 2017)  
Sustainability





# GLOSSARY

**absurdity**

the state of being ridiculous or wildly unreasonable

**agency**

a person or thing through which power is enacted or an end is achieved

**Age of Enlightenment**

17th and 18th Century intellectual movement favouring rational thought and scientific proof

**anatomical**

relating to the structure of the body

**anthropogenic**

influence of humans on nature

**catalyst**

a person or thing that accelerates an event or change

**ensorship**

the act of suppressing or deleting

**chimera**

consisting of diverse parts (imaginary or monster-like)

**colonial**

relating to a colony (see colonialism)

**colonial archive**

a recording of history from the colonial perspective using formats familiar to the colonising race, such as written records.

**colonialism**

the policy or practice of acquiring full partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically

**contingent**

dependent on something else

**counter-archive**

alternate record of history to the dominant record

**detrimental**

harmful or damaging

**dichotomy**

seemingly opposite and contradictory qualities

**disparate**

so unlike there is no basis for comparison

**ecological**

relating to the relationships between living things and their environments

**embodiment**

a tangible or visible form of an idea, quality, or feeling

**imperative**

of vital importance, crucial

**indentured**

required by contract to work for another for a certain period of time

**industrialisation**

the widespread development of industries in a country or region

**integral**

essential or fundamental; necessary to make a whole complete

**interdisciplinary**

relating to the combination of disciplines or art forms

**juxtapose**

to place different things close together, highlighting contrasts between them

**marginalised**

excluded from or existing outside the mainstream of society or a group

**montage**

a combination of several images to convey a story

**more-than-human**

multiple species inhabiting the earth, emphasising the context of a broader world outside of human existence

**multidisciplinary**

see interdisciplinary

**multimodal**

several attributes or ways of taking effect

**nebulous**

indistinct, vague

**oeuvre**

an artist's total body of work

**proliferation**

to increase in numbers through rapid production

**prosthetic**

an artificial device to replace or augment a part of the body

**psychoanalysis**

a method of analysing mental disorders, based on the concepts of Sigmund Freud

**the 'other'**

a philosophical idea identifying another being as external, dissimilar or alien to one's self.

**ubiquitous**

being everywhere at the same time

**ventriloquism**

the production of a voice so that it seems to come from a source other than the speaker



Artspace acknowledges and pays respects to the Gadigal people of the Eora nation as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which our office is based. Artspace pays respect to Elders past and present.

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