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We all know what it feels like to get so engrossed in a task that we forget everything else and time seems to fly by – we are fully present during this moment, but we are also outside ourselves – we are obsessed.

Obsessed: Compelled to make is an exhibition showcasing awe-inspiring creativity and innovation from across the spectrum of making – textiles, ceramics, furniture, metalwork, jewellery, conceptual art, glass blowing and sculptural weaving. The focus of this exhibition is not just on the works themselves but on what drives the making process itself. The exhibition seeks to highlight why making is important to us, how we make, what motivates us to make and why more of us are making than ever before. The extensive research into making that the curators Lisa Cahill and Penny Craswell undertook during the development this exhibition led them to the notion of obsession and how determination, focus, passion, persistence and skill all come together in a need to test and torture materials, invent new processes, suffer the turmoil of failure and enjoy the elation of success – a compulsion to make.

The exhibition presents the work and the stories of 14 artist/makers from all over Australia, delving beyond the finished object, beyond the personality of each maker, into the fundamental conceptual framework of their creations, the complexities of their materials and processes, and the realities of their day-to-day studio routine in the hope of unravelling what compels each maker to create over the course of their personal career – why this technique or material? Why that concept? How does the mind of a maker work?

We all know what it feels like to get so engrossed in a task that we forget everything else and time seems to fly by – we are fully present during this moment, but we are also outside ourselves – we are obsessed.
This education resource presents an overview of each maker's practice and their work for the exhibition, discussing some of the ideas, materials and concepts behind the work. For each maker, there are a series of linked activities inviting students to think, explore and extend their investigations through drawing, designing, making and writing. Although this resource is primarily targeted at students from years 3 – 7 all of the activities can be easily tailored to suit students of all ages. The activities are supported by a book list, links to websites and online videos providing further information about each maker.

Throughout the kit you will find references to symbols, they refer to:

- **Think**
  - Investigate and research before you visit

- **Explore**
  - The exhibition through questions and activities

- **Extend**
  - Your knowledge by further research, making, creating and designing
Gabriella Bisetto is a highly skilled glass artist who works across a variety of processes to translate the mechanisms, forms and ideologies of the human body through blown glass, hot sculpting and team projects. Her work draws on her ongoing interest in the body as a source of conflicted narratives, exploring how the medium of glass can be used to visualise and reinterpret the human body’s internal organs, shapes and activities, such as breathing, into glass forms, through which she tries to come to terms with the idea of our existence. She creates her work by manipulating glass in its molten state to blow sculptural vessels, and by hot sculpting glass to create minimalist forms that also explore her obsession with the seemingly impossible process of glassblowing. Gabriella loves the transparency of glass and the magic of being able to see through a clear three-dimensional form.

Gabriella was born into an Italian Catholic family, her childhood was spent on the family’s farm where she observed the cycle of life being played out endlessly and visibly through her surroundings, sowing the seeds for an ongoing fascination with the contradictions between the Catholic belief in the sanctity of life and the everyday realities of life and death. On the farm Gabriella had early lessons in how internal bodies and organs looked and felt whilst helping her family prepare animals for consumption and this has also had a lasting impact on her artwork.
Gabriella’s works centre around the theme of the body, the glass techniques and other materials she uses (such as hair or bread) depending on the concept for each work. The glass blown and moulded work in this exhibition, *Sustain*, is part of an ongoing series that uses the physical actions of glass processes to trap the transience of her own breath, measuring in inhalations, exhalations, minutes or hours, her presence and, at the same time, her past in a solid object. Gabriella has created the voids in the glass by directly capturing her breath into the glass form through the process of glass blowing, to represent breath as a momentarily held action. The process of making the work and its form also refer to the scientific process of how oxygen molecules transfer across cells or to the desire to ‘hold’ breath and with it time.

**Think**

How long do you think Gabriella had to blow for to create the space inside this work?
Do you know what is glass made from?

**Explore**

What is the longest time you can hold your breath for? How long can you exhale your breath for?
Try making a bubble mixture using detergent – observe the difference in the bubbles you can make by blowing for shorter and longer periods of time. What happens if you blow through different shapes and sizes of bubble wands – try making some with wire and observe the different kinds of bubbles you can make.
Think about the lifecycle of your bubble, what happens when it pops? Imagine if you could watch it pop in slow motion – draw what this would look like, or make a film.

**Extend**

Gabriella’s work is about the body, she is interested in breath, the flow of blood, the internal organs. The work she makes expresses how she imagines the body and its sensations to look. Think about how you would visually represent the interior or actions of your body. Draw what you think they might look like? Gabriella often draws on other materials rich in cultural and religious symbolism, such as hair and bread, to symbolise the body. What other materials could you use to symbolise the body?
Lorraine Connelly-Northey is a Waradgerie mixed media artist who has become known for her oversized installations of woven vessels made from fibre and recycled materials found on the land. Lorraine’s work and material usage reflect her mixed heritage, the practices of her Aboriginal mother’s Waradgerie country and other tribal boundaries where people, still today use fibre vessels to collect and carry in their daily lives. Lorraine does not use traditional materials in her work, instead she uses recycled, found materials such as rabbit-proof fencing wire and corrugated iron collected from abandoned rubbish dumps. These are harsh, seemingly unworkable materials, but with physical effort and skill, using her knowledge of coil weaving techniques, Lorraine transforms them into works which revise yet resemble the original cultural objects such as koolimans (bush bowls) and narbongs (string bags). Her work is a distinctive reflection of her connection to the land – at once contemporary and yet still honouring history and the cultural practices of the old people, her works are statements of sovereignty that she hopes will act as guides for generations to come. It is important for Lorraine that people see the underlying way that she is looking at Aboriginal Australia, in particular the Waradgerie (Waradjuri) and Wongaibong (Wongibong) tribal boundaries, rather than the modern towns that are built on and over that land. She says “my practice is about using found materials, my work is about the injustices of Aboriginal Australians. It’s about scavenging rusty tin and wire.”

When I’m off country, I’m a caretaker of another country. I’m a respectful caretaker. It’s very powerful to be able to source material from your own tribal boundaries because the most powerful thing about my work is that I’m taking back country.
As a child growing up in a farming family in the Riverina-Mallee environments of Swan Hill in north-western Victoria, Lorraine and her Dad would go scavenging at the dump down the back of the property for spare parts to fix machines. She was taught by him to see beyond the intended use of an object to what else it could be – she says that “when I look at a drainpipe, I see in it a didgeridoo”. She combines this creative re-use with the weaving she has learned from her Mother’s heritage. Whilst they were fossicking, Lorraine’s Dad introduced her to the native and introduced plants in the environment where they lived and she then sought out which ones she could weave with, whilst imagining what she could do with the rusty old tins and spare parts she would also find. She realised that she could take her weaving knowledge and apply it to what her parents called ‘rubbish’, but what the art world calls ‘found materials’. She transforms these materials, refashioning them into tools and implements that are reminiscent of the objects used by Indigenous peoples in Australia, into bags, bowls, and other vessels. The objects that Lorraine makes are intended to reclaim country and remind you that “white Australia does have a black history”, her works are designed to draw you in and get you thinking about the injustices suffered by her ancestors.

Think
Do you know the name of the Aboriginal land on which you live? What do you know about the traditional owners of this land?

Explore
Research the history of the Aboriginal people from your area. What are the traditional making techniques used in this area, what kinds of objects were made here, what materials were used?

Extend
Lorraine’s work is about issues like injustice, reclaiming country and identity. Think about a political issue which you are passionate about and make a work with found objects expressing your feelings about it.
OR
The objects that Lorraine makes are based on traditional vessels used for carrying, however instead of weaving them using fibre, she uses man-made materials found on the land. Make a vessel for carrying using found materials.
Honor Freeman

Clay is both humble and humbling. It can be temperamental in nature and if ever you think you have it figured out, it will remind you that there is still much to learn.

Adelaide based ceramic artist Honor Freeman is inspired by the artefacts and routines of everyday domesticity, skilfully handcrafting objects that belie their materiality and purpose. Honor’s mastery of slip-casting – a ceramic technique commonly used in industry, allows her to make faithful, lifelike reconstructions of ordinary things in porcelain. She uses the clay to recreate old used up cakes of soap, old sponges, buckets and other household vessels, besser blocks, Tupperware and even light switches. Honor is motivated by her love of capturing something of everyday lived experience, a captured moment, a spilled liquid, a stack of old sponges left to dry; she sees these objects and events as metaphors for life. She says “fundamentally I draw inspiration from the minutiae of the very ordinariness of everyday life. The domestic landscape that surrounds us; the humble, democratic and overlooked objects and routines we engage with daily. This could be the dust that collects under the bed, a certain slant of light, a chip in the lip of a favourite cup, or simply when there’s time to reflect and ponder. It all holds potential and is a rich vein for the many metaphors of life.”
Close your eyes and picture a room in your house – it could be the kitchen or the bathroom or a different space. Think about the objects in it that you touch and use every day, what do they look like? How do they change with use? Share your ideas with the class.

Think

Explore

Extend

Choose one of the objects you have drawn, imagine you are the object. Write a short story about its secret life. Illustrate your writing with some more drawings of the object. When you get home look at the object again carefully – how well did you capture it?

The works that Honor makes are calming and meditative to look at, but the process of recreating these things of domestic ordinariness in porcelain is complicated and painstaking, requiring, patience and physical endurance to achieve perfection. Honor’s skill and commitment to her work evokes a comfortable ease in making akin to the domestic comforts of home. An honest and simple beauty comes from taking a humble material from the earth and using that to recreate ordinary, everyday objects. Honor’s work asks us to reconsider our surroundings and notice the overlooked things that we take for granted in our homes. She says “inspiration is everywhere if the conditions are right”.

Think

Explore

Extend
Jon Goulder

I want to do things nobody else would be prepared to do because they involve processes that are too labour intensive or seem like crazy ideas.

Jon Goulder is a furniture designer-maker based in Adelaide, a master craftsperson he creates his one-off pieces, limited editions and prototypes by hand in his workshop. Jon is a fourth-generation furniture maker and he says that “making became my destiny when I fell in love with my family’s furniture-making factory – from my earliest memories, the factory was a place of wonder, excitement and potential”. Jon left school at fifteen to start an apprenticeship before going on to study in the Wood Workshop at the ANU School of Art, where he was able to evolve his practice, being constantly challenged to improve his technical mastery while also demonstrating artistic innovation in original designs.

Jon loves the all absorbing process of designing and making furniture, saying that he is prepared to go through what he describes as “the fear of the unknown and the hardship of the discovery.” He wants to “do things nobody else would be prepared to do because they involve processes that are too labour intensive or seem like crazy ideas.” He works in stages, after coming up with an idea he will model and prototype the new design and then, if he knows it’s a winner, he will become completely immersed in the engineering and the structure of the piece. Jon says that this process can be incredibly complex, especially when making chairs, because you need to know how to triangulate and brace joints, consider ergonomics (the interaction of the human being and how they feel when they sit in a chair), and the engineering of each component and how it will stand up to years and years of use.
Jon comes from a family of makers, what do people in your family make? What tools do they use to make things? *Hint: making is not just about making objects, look at what people are doing inside and outside your home...

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Explore
Think about why certain tools were invented, then do some research. You might investigate how long ago they were invented, why they were invented, how they have changed and whether they have been adapted for different uses.

Extend
The makers in this exhibition all use very specific tools for their work, sometimes they have adapted tools from other practices in their work or made their own. What are some of the tools that they use? Invent your own tool for making – what will you use it for? Draw it and make notes about what it is made from and what it is for. Perhaps you could also make your tool and test it.

He also says that he is “a little bit of an exception to the rule when it comes to materials because I see them as a means to end. I try to use materials as responsibly as I can but I don’t marvel over the beauty of a piece of wood.” This ethos sees Jon take a pioneering approach to materials, developing new ways of manipulating and working with them to achieve his vision.

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Kath Inglis is an Adelaide based jeweller who has honed her craft through decades of working with one material – PVC, a seemingly ordinary, clear sheet plastic which she skilfully transforms; dyeing, carving and fusing it to create luminous jewellery. Kath was trained in and works with the language of traditional jewellery making, but through her mastery of a cheap, everyday material, she gently turns these traditions upside down. In Kath’s work, it is her mastery and skilful manipulation of the material that brings value, rather than the material itself. She says that “the relationship/language between the material, maker and tool is central to my practice.”

Kath’s work is inspired by a range of concepts including climate and weather events, her home in the Adelaide Hills, environmental issues, landscapes and the passage of light. Her work is, at times also deeply personal, exploring ideas of family, social and cultural history. Kath’s current work explores identity – the way “it is changeable, wanted, discarded worked, concealed, layered and multifaceted.”

Jewellery drew me in so tight. I loved that it was highly personal but very public. That it was worn on the individual and not on a wall. That it was a potent vessel for story. I fell in love quickly and hard.
Her recently discovered Polynesian heritage has led her to reinterpret the lei – which is a neck adornment given in Pacific cultures as a greeting and when saying goodbye, “to honour and bestow specialness and in recognition of achievement. The giving of lei is an inclusive and connected ritual and a joyful practice; on receiving it you become acknowledged.” Kath loves that jewellery is at once highly personal and also very public, and says it is a “potent vessel” for stories. The lei that Kath has made for this exhibition is shown with the sheet of PVC that it has been cut from; by presenting the work in this way Kath quietly, but powerfully draws our attention to ideas of presence, and absence.


Think

The PVC that Kath uses can be found in many everyday situations, such as the blinds outside shops and cafes that are pulled down when it rains. Think about and gather some other everyday materials that could be transformed into jewellery.

Explore

In this exhibition, Kath has carved PVC to make a lei, which is a traditional necklace that is presented on special occasions in many Pacific cultures. Lei are traditionally made using repeated elements like flowers (like a daisy chain), and placed over the wearer’s head. How could you transform the materials you have been thinking about into a lei?

Extend

Start playing with the materials you have gathered – see if you can cut, slice and thread them into a lei.
Laura McCusker is a furniture designer and maker who works from a converted apple packing shed in Hobart alongside her husband. Authenticity of materials is vital to Laura, who combines traditional woodworking skills with contemporary cutting-edge design. Laura’s materials are her inspiration, she embraces the beauty of local timbers like Mountain Ash and Stringy Bark, crafting works that hold a deep connection to place, using “local, often very undervalued materials, treating them in an authentic and honest way, highlighting the beauty that often goes unnoticed.” Laura says that she is always looking to rediscover traditional techniques that can be used in her work including ways of working with the colour and texture of the timber to elevate its beauty, so that the viewer looks and thinks twice about simple materials, questioning ideas of value.

Each piece Laura makes is different due to the individual properties of the handmade, the specific needs of the end user and the unique attributes of the natural materials she uses. Laura is passionate about timber, but the emotional connection she makes with her clients is also extremely important. Laura collaborates with her clients from the start of a piece and carries their stories into the work she makes for them so that “meaning is embedded within the object and heirlooms are made” through the collaborative process with the client.
Why are some objects so special? How can objects carry history with them? How does the object’s material contribute to its value?

Are there any items of furniture or other objects at home which have a special story? What are they? Describe them, thinking about the materials they are made from and how the material contributes to why they are special. Write the history of one of the special objects, make sure you include some drawings of it.

Design a special piece of furniture for someone you know, have a conversation with them to start the collaborative design process. What sort of questions would you ask the person that you are making for to help you to design the piece and make it special? Make drawings as you talk together. What material would you make it from to help tell a story? Present your finished design drawing to your collaborator.

She shares images of the progress of the work with her clients, giving them a sense of ownership and engagement with the piece from the start. She says she has had clients “print all the photos (of a piece of furniture), from timber yard to the first dinner party, and keep them in an album” to pass on to their children with the piece, so the work is passed on with its story. This is a way of ensuring the longevity of the piece, meaning it has a greater chance of being treasured for generations to come. Laura believes it is important that the work has a long life and that “if you are using a tree that’s 100 years old to make furniture, you want that furniture to last for at least 100 years”. She says “there’s no reason why furniture made today shouldn’t be able to last 500 or 600 years.”
Elbowrkshp is the studio of Elliat Rich and James B Young, who are partners in practice and life. Their work combines Elliat’s conceptual approach to contemporary design with James’ skills in traditional leatherwork and shoemaking. A desire to travel together 3 years into their relationship, saw them undertake a year long, 2000 kilometre trek with two camels and three donkeys taking them from the Snowy Mountains to Broken Hill before they settled in Alice Springs. This trek was a formative experience for the couple; before setting off they learned how to work with animals and made all of their own equipment from the camel saddles and pack gear to the buckles holding them together. Basing themselves away from the design scenes of Melbourne and Sydney was a conscious choice and one that has enriched and informed their practice. They love what James describes as the “wildness” of Alice Springs, they take inspiration from their remote location including its language, peoples, cultures and seasons. The products they make as Elbowrkshp are their collaborative musings inspired by Alice Springs and its stories, James describes their work as “parochial, built to last and informed by our designer-maker family fusion.” Elliat adds that their inspiration comes from “craftsmanship, place, provenance, ideas and materials, a sense of community, belonging to place, complexity, old meeting new, morals, values and ethics.”

Thinking is the backbone to my obsession, working through the mechanics or semantics of an idea in my head. Visualising, conceptualising, bringing memories and experiences to the fore and rolling them all together is a joy. Elliat Rich
Think about the place where you live. What are the characteristics that make it unique? You might consider your town, your street, your school. Brainstorm your ideas and make a map of the place.

Explore the place you have chosen, take your map with you and continue to add to it, draw picture and make notes on your map about the things you see. Look carefully around you for materials that could be used to design and make an object that tells a story about your place. What would the object be?

Extend
Collect or source the materials you have chosen to represent your place. Use them to make your object. Write a short description of the object explaining how it relates to the place. (Remember to be respectful of the environment and culture when you are collecting found materials).

Elliat and James are currently working with sandstone which was an early building material in Alice Springs and formed the floor of the Larapintine Sea around 500 million years ago. It is a delicate material and one that they say is “inviting to work with... (as) we can use relatively crude technology to achieve beautiful results”. For them it is a material which “talks a lot about this place and our relationships to and use of it” because it really is a physical piece of the landscape. Elliat describes the time that is encapsulated in the sandstone as being “beyond our comprehension”, she marvels at the beauty of this ancient material, the way its colours blend into each other; its textures revealing that it was made from the sand of the ocean. Sandstone and the way its colours blend is a great metaphor for the way that Elliat and James work together, Elliat says “if family are rocks, work is the finer grain. For us, our work fits in around the needs of the family” and their children often join them at the bench, sometimes participating in the processes of production. Elbowrkshwp are a solid, grounded team, although their individual approaches are quite different, for James making is a time-consuming process, whereas thinking and planning are the backbone of Elliat’s approach to making, she says that “current projects are like a worn stone in my pocket, waiting to be handled at any opportunity.”
Kate Rohde

You know how bowerbirds collect blue things? [As a kid,] I wanted everything aqua. Now, working with colours in my workshop, I use the very expensive cobalt teal pigment powder, which is also quite toxic and poisonous.

Melbourne-based artist Kate Rohde makes highly ornate sculptural objects, taking inspiration from Rococo and Baroque decorative art, science, zoomorphism and the 18th century wunderkammer or cabinet of curiosities, old fashioned natural history museums, minerals and crystals, and the work of architects and artists including Jeff Koons. Kate’s works are a kind of sensory overload – bright, shiny, sparkly and wildly colourful. Her practice includes objects, wallpaper, interiors, jewellery and fashion, but it is her large-scale sculptural pieces that show both the depth of her conceptual originality and also the extent of her technical and material mastery. Her dedication to continual experimentation with resin’s virtually unlimited potential has allowed the level of ambition in her practice to grow enormously and her work is becoming increasingly larger and more complex. Beneath the playful exterior however, her process is difficult and time consuming, with every step requiring skill and extreme focus. Kate starts by hand-building forms in clay or plasticine before creating moulds and casting the pieces in resin – a process that is both scientific and painterly; finally sanding and polishing them using power tools.
Although Kate’s work largely draws on the elaborate flourishes and over the top naturalism of Baroque and Rococo decorative arts, she constantly keeps an eye out for inspiration, her unique use of colour can be traced to her love of old natural history books and National Geographic magazines from the 1960s and 1970s which have painted colour illustrations that are slightly unnatural, due to the printing processes used at the time. Despite being inspired by depictions of the natural world and illustrations of it from times passed, Kate loves to use saturated synthetic colours, especially a very expensive cobalt teal pigment powder (which is also quite poisonous), she says that it is “a colour that is very unnatural – about as against nature as you can get.” It is this bold use of colour that makes her work so distinctive, providing an exciting tension between the natural and unnatural worlds as seen in the fantastical creatures she has created for this exhibition.

Think
Kate creates fantastical creatures and vessels using bright, unnatural colours, some of her creations seem to have the characteristics of several different types of animal. What kinds of animals can you see in the works she has made for this exhibition? How has she used colour to highlight the different characteristics of the creatures?

Explore
Creatures with the characteristics of several animals are called hybrids. If you could create a hybrid creature, what would it look like, which animals would inspire your creature? Would it have magic powers? Make a drawing of your hybrid animal and then model it using plasticine and write a museum display tag giving it a name and describing its special features.

Extend
Kate talks about being inspired by 18th Century wunderkammer or Cabinets of Curiosity – these were big, glass fronted cupboards containing a combination of wonderful treasures, curious objects, specimens and drawings. Perhaps your class could create its own wunderkammer display by putting everyone’s hybrid creatures and display tags together.
Oliver Smith

Oliver Smith is an innovative and skilled silversmith, whose family includes generations of jewellers and metalsmiths, including makers of armour. Oliver is deeply fascinated by metals and their properties; by metal’s simultaneous permanence and ability to be transformed through melting or being worked with tools. He loves the process of melting silver into a mercurial liquid and then transforming it through hammering, a process which creates a grain in the metal, simultaneously transforming it on the outside and on the inside at an atomic level. Oliver specialises in working metal using a hammer, his favourite technique is hot forging which is most suitable for making cutlery. This has led him to focus his practice on making cutlery and objects for the table, inspired by the warmth and friendliness of the shared meal. The shapes of Oliver’s tableware designs are sometimes informed by animals, the familiar shapes of dorsal fins and antlers have inspired a cheese knife, and salad server respectively. Oliver spends a lot of time drawing, but he says that he tries not to over-design the outcomes of his work so that the processes he works with in the studio are about trying to make the work ‘in conversation’ with the material and the process.

An artist’s studio is an amazing place, a laboratory where anything can happen. I think a silversmith’s workshop is the best version of that studio context, as it functions as an alchemical frame that enables a wide range of making processes to be enacted, and for the artist to transform materials in exciting ways.
Recently Oliver has been researching the symbolic language of gold and silversmithing, seeking to understand and create a contemporary view of the craft’s ancient origins. He has been exploring archaeological evidence for references to ancient animal motifs, looking at talismans (wearables and objects thought to have magic powers), charms (worn to attract luck) and amulets (worn as protection from danger) from the earliest examples of human culture. Through his research Oliver has discovered symbolic representations that embody ideas still active and recognisable in the jewellery that we wear today. Oliver is now translating his research into wearables that examine animal symbolism, whilst continuing his innovative explorations of the qualities of metals. He describes this work as “investigating the vitality of the subject – the animal symbol – and the connection to precious metals and their dynamic and everlasting qualities.”

Think
Look carefully at the work Oliver has made for the exhibition, what are some of the symbols and shapes he has chosen to work with, what might they mean? Can you identify the animals he is referring to? Why do you think he has chosen them? How has Oliver incorporated parts of animals into his work?

Explore
What kinds of symbolic qualities can you think of for different animals? Talk about your ideas and why you think that each animal has that quality. Think about how you could translate an animal’s symbolic qualities into a wearable amulet, charm or talisman – make a mind map to list your ideas. What properties will the amulet, charm or talisman have?

Extend
Using your mind map, make some drawings and design your wearable amulet, charm or talisman then make it using aluminium foil! What other materials could you add to enhance its magic powers?
Vipoo Srivilas is a highly skilled Melbourne-based ceramicist who is recognised internationally for his "cute" zoomorphic figurines which are ornately covered (or dressed) with flowers and other decorative elements. Underneath its cute exterior however, Vipoo’s work addresses important issues such as cultural disconnection and environmental degradation. His work playfully mixes European historical figurative and Asian decorative art practices with contemporary culture. Vipoo uses blue and white ceramics as a metaphor for East and West in his work, as it is a cultural language that most people can connect with. He creates complex narratives through the highly decorated surfaces of his ceramic figurines, which require close observation, as key elements of the story are often found hidden in unusual places within the forms, which often take the form of self-portraits.

Vipoo’s works explore similarities between the cultures of his native home, Thailand and his adoptive home, Australia, as well as exploring culture shifts and migration experiences. He says “I have lived in Australia for twenty years and I lived in Thailand for twenty years so it’s half-half now, and it blends really well.” He also says that his Thai cultural roots come out unintentionally, “for example, in Thai temples, every surface is decorated and somehow that has translated into my work because I like to decorate my work on every surface. Sometimes I just can’t identify which part is Thai and which part is Australian – it’s mixed together.”
Vipoo’s interest in cultural identity not only influences the way that his work looks, it also permeates the conceptual aspects of his practice including an ongoing obsession “with the introduction of species, issues of immigration and experiences of shifting culture” as seen in his recent work, which features introduced species to Australia including rabbits and Lantana flowers. He says “for me, the rabbit is so cute and pretty, I didn’t realise it is a pest. Sometimes you have no idea that nice and cute things are actually bad.” Vipoo tells these serious stories with an emphasis on making work which is beautiful, saying “Beautiful things connect to people and are more easily understood. I like to make work that’s accessible for a wide audience and beauty is a vehicle for that.”

Think

Vipoo often uses depictions of introduced plant and animal species as way of talking about cultural difference and migration in his work. Can you identify any on the work you can see in this exhibition? Vipoo has used extra materials to help decorate the surface of his clay figurines - what are they?

Explore

Vipoo often refers to his figurines as self-portraits, he uses elements of different animals and plants to describe aspects of himself. If you were to make a self-portrait inspired by Vipoo’s work, what sorts of animals or plants would you use to describe yourself? Make a drawing of yourself using parts of the plants and animals as decoration. You might also want to think about the visual style of some of your favourite animated characters for inspiration.

Extend

Using plasticine or clay, make a self-portrait figurine based on your drawing – don’t forget to include lots of decoration, you might want to add pom poms, crystals and other materials like Vipoo has done in his work.
Tjunkaya Tapaya

I am weaving animals to be stitched to my self-portrait, like they are pouring out of me. That’s how my weaving ideas come, flowing from my hands and body.

Tjunkaya Tapaya is a senior Anangu woman based in Ernabella, South Australia. She divides her time as an artist painting for Ernabella Artists in the mornings and weaving in the afternoons for Tjanpi Desert Weavers. Tjunkaya holds senior positions in her community and is a keeper of culture and stories. It is these stories and experiences that she weaves into her work, an important element being to pass on culture and skills to new generations of makers. It is important to Tjunkaya that making traditions are passed down through the generations, she says that this is what makes culture strong and she wants her creations to teach the children. Tjunkaya is frequently involved in making large, collaborative works for exhibitions with other Tjanpi artists. The artists get together and have a bush camp where they make wonderful things and tell stories, sit around the camp fire at night and sing inma (song and dance). Tjunkaya says that she likes “to see what the other women are making... that inspires me, and I help them to make their artwork strong.”

In her own work Tjunkaya likes to make animals with curious faces. She says that when she goes walking in country, hunting for bush tucker, everything she sees is inspiring in some way; she says “sometimes I see an animal with something in its mouth. It’s been hunting too. I go right home and make it exactly as I saw it: ngintaka perentie (lizard), malu (kangaroo), kalaya (emu), tjati (small lizard), kipara (bush turkey), all these animals”.

Tjunkaya Tapaya, 2017. Photo: Angus Lee Forbes
Tjunkaya has three little dogs who go everywhere with her, even places dogs are not supposed to go, so she has made them part of her self-portrait for this exhibition, which is made from layers and layers and layers of tjanpi (local grasses) all stitched on top of each other. She says of the making process for the work “I am weaving animals to be stitched to my self-portrait, like they are pouring out of me. That’s how my weaving ideas come. Flowing from my hands and body.” Tjunkaya’s work is a way of telling different stories about herself and her country and looking forward to a bright future – she wants the young people in her community to have the same inspirations, skills and opportunities for making art that she has had. Her ambition for her people is more employment in the arts and with this greater health and happiness. Tjunkaya says that she has made this sculpture to show the women in her community how to make small animal sculptures and to show the young people what is possible.

Think
If you were to make a self-portrait, what are the important things that you would include? Would you include your pets (if you have them)? Think about the things that make you who you are – write them down.

Explore
Self-portraiture is one of the great traditions of art. Do some research into the genre and see how different artists have represented themselves. Return to your list and try making your own self portrait – you might want to start with a drawing or collage and then a plasticine or clay model.

Extend
Try making your self-portrait using other materials – you might want to try it using sticks as a framework and then building up colour, form and texture, like Tjunkaya, by wrapping and stitching wool, raffia or other fibres to your framework.
Louise Weaver is a Melbourne-based contemporary artist whose experimental approach sees her working across a range of different materials and mediums to create sculptures and paintings that reveal the narrative potential of everyday objects, relics and animal forms. Louise is inspired by a huge range of fascinating topics including the natural environment and biodiversity, materiality and decoration, exploring ideas such as camouflage, transformation, metamorphosis. Louise became known in the art world during the 1990s for her sculptural animals, with bright colours and patterns crocheted over a hard body. Addressing the destruction of existing natural habitats and resulting decrease in biodiversity, the works also play with distinctions between the natural and the artificial.

For Louise making art is a way of interacting with and understanding the world. She says “I have always wanted to be an artist – probably before I even knew what the word meant. When I was in Grade One of my primary school, we were asked to make a drawing, which was an assemblage of animal parts. I used part of a giraffe and part of a horse, and it had wings and was very imaginative and decorative.” Louise has followed her passion ever since and traces of this important early drawing can still be seen in her work. She loves trialling ideas and testing materials, seeing how can be pushed and used in new, often-unexpected ways.

Often my best ideas occur when I least expect it – when I let things just wash over me – a state that is almost a form of meditation – being open to the question “what if?”.
Louise loves trialling ideas and testing materials, seeing how they can be pushed and used in new, often-unexpected ways. What are some materials that you like to use, or would like to try – think about how you could use them differently. Brainstorm your ideas with your classmates to come up with a list of materials to experiment with.

Choose 5 of the materials from your list and play with them – see if you can use them differently. Show your classmates the results – observe how each person in the class might have used the material differently. Talk about what worked and what didn’t.

Louise often works in series, making versions of ideas in different materials. Try making 5 versions of the same thing (it might be an animal, inspired by Louise’s work in the exhibition) using your favourite techniques discovered during your material play exercise.

Louise visits museums and galleries on a regular basis and says “I learn new things by looking at artwork/artefacts and apply this knowledge in inventive ways for my own purposes.” She spends a long time mastering material processes and techniques, such as crochet, but these are always secondary to the ideas that frame her work. She often works in series, making versions of ideas in different materials and tries to discover something new in everything she does. To date her practice has seen her create paintings, as well as installations, sculpture, drawings, prints, multiples, ceramics, glass, photographs, digital and sound work.

**Think**

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Photo: Mark Ashkenasy
Liz Williamson is a highly accomplished weaver based in Sydney, Australia. She says “I always had an interest in making things. It’s always been part of my life, influenced by my mother, a maker and craftsperson. In the 1970s I spent several years overseas and before returning to Australia, many months in India, a place she still visits several times a year. This time away influenced my future career choice”. Working from her home studio, Liz integrates weaving into her day-to-day life mixing designing, weaving, home, garden and travel alongside her position as an academic at UNSW and an ongoing role working with and advising artisan groups in India. Being at the loom, weaving can be a repetitive process, throwing the shuttle numerous times, inserting the weft into the warp to create a woven structure, there is a beautiful logical system of preparation and action that must be followed to make cloth, by knowing this process intimately, Liz is able to evolve variations of process and explore the endless possibilities of weaving. Her ideas and ways of working interlace and evolve whilst exploring “themes of wearing, covering and protecting, construction and repair, land and water” (Cochrane, 2008 p.11).
Liz is interested in the diversity of weaving traditions around the world and how environment, social and cultural circumstances have influenced specific regional weaving traditions and she has explored many aspects of these in her research and making. In the 1980s she wove large coverings, created by stitching together narrow hand woven sections referencing strip woven cloths of West Africa. She has also experimented extensively with the idea of darning, the repair of cloth and domestic textiles, making a series of textiles that reflected on what happens to cloth over its life as it is worn and wears out. Recent work has continued to examine the close relationship between textiles, the body and place. The Shadows series is made from natural materials and captures the hidden beauty and natural aesthetic of the local environment. The work is woven from naturally dyed fabric into tonally coloured, irregularly repeated and randomly patterned panels reminiscent of historical handmade quilts or rag rugs, it reflects on the environment while evoking associations to domestic tasks, making do, re-use and the repurposing of textiles and garments.

Think
Can you think of any natural plant materials that can be used to dye fabric? Brainstorm with your classmates and write down your ideas.

Look carefully at how the three works by Liz have been displayed – what might this refer to?
(You will find a clue in the materials she has used!) Look at some of the other works in the exhibition – have any others been displayed in a way that helps to tell a story about the work?

Explore
Use some old white or pale coloured cotton fabric, cut it into strips or panels, then gather some of the natural materials you thought of and experiment with dyeing your fabric.

Extend
Stitch your strips of dyed fabric back together to create a panelled textile artwork.
Amulet type of jewellery worn as protection from danger.

Baroque is a highly ornate and often extravagant style of architecture, art and music that flourished in Europe from the early 17th until the late 18th century. The Baroque style used contrast, movement, exuberant detail, grandeur and surprise to achieve a sense of awe.

Blue and white porcelain or china is a style of pottery that originated in China, was imported to Europe where it was copied in a European style before being copied again in China. A quick history: Blue and white decoration first became widely used in Chinese porcelain in the 14th century, after the cobalt pigment for the blue began to be imported from Persia. It was widely exported, and inspired imitative wares in Islamic ceramics, and in Japan, and later European tin-glazed earthenware such as Delftware and after the techniques were discovered in the 18th century, European porcelain. Blue and white pottery in all of these traditions continues to be produced, most of it copying earlier styles.

Charm type of jewellery worn to attract luck.

Coolamon/koolimon is an Indigenous Australian carrying it is a multi-purpose shallow vessel, or dish with curved sides, ranging in length from 30–70 cm, and similar in shape to a canoe. Coolamons were traditionally used by Aboriginal women to carry water, fruits, nuts, as well as to cradle babies.

Concept an abstract idea. In conceptual art and design, the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work, it informs decisions about the entire work, from materials to form, colour, texture, scale etc. A conceptual artist or designer uses whatever materials and whatever form is most appropriate to putting their idea across to an audience.

Lampworking is a type of glasswork where a torch or lamp is primarily used to melt the glass. Once in a molten state, the glass is formed by blowing and shaping with tools and hand movements.

Larapintine (or Larapinta) Sea was a warm shallow sea that covered much of Australia during the Ordovician Period which lasted almost 45 million years, beginning 488.3 million years ago and ending 443.7 million years ago.

Lei is a garland or wreath. Loosely defined, a lei is any series of objects strung together with the intent to be worn. A lei may be composed of a pattern or series of just about anything that can be strung together and worn as a necklace, but most commonly consists of fresh natural foliage such as flowers, leaves, vines, fern fronds, and seeds but may also include sea or land shells, fish teeth, bones, feathers, plastic flowers, fabric, paper (including origami and monetary bills), candy. There are many customs and protocols associated with the giving, receiving, wearing, storing, and disposing of lei. In Polynesian cultures, a lei is something that is created by someone and given to another with the intent to decorate that person for an emotional reason—usually as a sign of affection. Common reasons include greeting, farewell, affection or love, friendship, appreciation, congratulation, recognition, or to otherwise draw attention to the recipient.

Metaphor a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else, or a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable.
Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) or polyvinyl chloride is a tough chemically resistant synthetic resin made by polymerizing vinyl chloride, it is used for a wide variety of products including pipes, flooring, and sheeting. It is the world’s third-most widely produced synthetic plastic polymer. PVC comes in two basic forms: rigid (sometimes abbreviated as RPVC) and flexible.

Rococo (or late Baroque) was an exuberantly decorative 18th century European style with playful and witty themes. Rococo pushed principles of illusion and theatricality to the extreme, an effect achieved by dense ornament, asymmetry, fluid curves, and the use of white and pastel colours combined with gilding, drawing the eye in all directions.

Slip casting is a technique for the production of pottery and ceramics, especially for shapes not easily made on a wheel. The process involves a liquid clay body slip being poured into plaster moulds and allowed to form a layer, the cast, on the inside walls of the mould. In a solid cast mould, ceramic objects such as handles and plates are surrounded by plaster on all sides with a reservoir for slip, and are removed when the solid piece is held within. For a hollow cast mould, for objects such as vases and cups, once the plaster has absorbed most of the liquid from the outside layer of clay the remaining slip is poured off for later use. After a period for further absorption of water, the cast piece is removed from the mould once it is leather-hard, that is, firm enough to handle without losing its shape. It is then "fettled" (trimmed neatly) and allowed to dry out further, usually overnight or for several hours. This produces a greenware piece which is then ready to be decorated, glazed and fired in a kiln. The technique is suited to the production of complex shapes.

Vacuum forming is a simplified version of thermoforming, where a sheet of plastic is heated to a forming temperature, stretched onto a single-surface mould, and forced against the mould by a vacuum. Jon Goulder has developed a technique for vacuum forming leather.

Wunderkammer also known as Cabinets of Curiosities were encyclopaedic collections of objects including objects belonging to natural history (sometimes faked), geology, ethnography, archaeology, religious or historical relics, works of art and antiquities.

Zoomorphism is when animal characteristics are assigned to humans, god and inanimate objects. In art it can mean art that imagines humans as non-human animals. Art that portrays one species of animal like another species of animal.

Tjanpi means grasses. The Tjanpi Desert Weavers is a not-for-profit social enterprise of Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council (NPYWC), an Aboriginal governed and directed Corporation. NPYWC members created Tjanpi (meaning ‘grass’) to enable women on the NPY Lands to earn a regular income from selling their fibre art. More than 300+ Aboriginal women artists from 28 remote communities in the western and central deserts of Australia come together on country to create beautiful, intricate and whimsical fibre art. Tjanpi provides one of the few opportunities for self-initiated income on the NPY Lands and brings Aboriginal women together on country to collect grass, sculpt and weave, sing and dance and keep culture strong.

Talisman wearables and objects thought to have magic powers.
Reading List

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