

IDENTIFY

Consider the role that art and visual culture can play in shaping contemporary understandings of identity.

VIEW ONLINE

QAGOMA
LEARNING

ANNE NOBLE

RUBY'S ROOM NO. 17 2001



Anne Noble / New Zealand b.1954 / *Ruby's room no. 17* 2001 / Digital colour print on Hahnemühle rag paper, ed. 6/10 / 91.5 x 119.9cm / Purchased 2006. Queensland Art Gallery / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Anne Noble

In her 'Ruby's room' series Anne Noble has created closely cropped, unconventional portraits of her daughter Ruby. In a world full of images, we are familiar with seeing faces looking back at us. Here we see a single, intimate detail of a person without being able to see the person themselves. Whilst confronting, the study of one area of the face is not uncommon to the practice of artists, but also biologists and doctors. However, this image goes beyond a mere study; it holds a story about a mother-daughter relationship, as well as the familiar sensation of tasting confectionery. The work is a playful and intimate study made by a photographer, a professor and a mother. The gap in what we do not see is filled by what the artist does repeatedly draw our attention to — the mouth.

LOOK

Adopt a slow-looking approach to *Ruby's room no. 17*. Spend the first minute moving your eye around to different areas across the image to study details that may not have appeared at first glance. Spend as long as you can staring into the dark blue texture at the back of the tongue.

THINK

1. What might Ruby have had in her mouth to make it this colour? Have you had a similar experience?
2. As babies we begin to understand the world by using our hands, noses and mouths. Does this change as we get older? If so, how?

CREATE

Use your hands to frame your own mouth. Twist, open and manipulate your lips, tongue and the muscles around your mouth to change the contours of this part of your face. Take 'close up' photographs of your mouth and sketch the various images to create a record. Consider whether your images are self-portraits or abstracts.

Choose either the eyes, ears, nose or hands and repeat the process of altering and manipulating this body part, photographing and sketching to create a folio of studies.

**MICHAEL
PAREKOWHAI**
KAPA HAKA (WHERO)
2003



Michael Parekowhai / New Zealand b.1968 / *Kapa Haka (Whero)* 2003 / Fibreglass, automotive paint / 188 x 60 x 50cm / Purchased 2009 with funds from Tim Fairfax, AM, through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Michael Parekowhai

In an era of heightened surveillance brought about through advancements in artificial intelligence, *Kapa haka (Whero)* raises complex questions about security and identity. At the same time, the work is humorous in intent. The momentary illusion of a sculpture of a security guard protecting sculptures and other artworks in a gallery is made possible by a concealed base that keeps the top heavy body upright. The form, uniform and body language depict the performative power stance of large male figure in the workplace, while the title of the work and the complexion of the glossy fiberglass figure allude to a cultural performance. *Kapa haka (Whero)* reveals the dual identity of a sculpture that can entertain and intimidate, a figure that is identifiable and without identity — qualities that an ‘everyman’ may identify with.

LOOK

Look at the materials and dimensions in the caption for *Kapa Haka (Whero)* and imagine placing the sculpture somewhere at your school, in your house, or around your neighbourhood.

THINK

1. What does the sculpture communicate about our shared (universal) response to, or reading of, the human form?
2. What does it mean for audiences to share a space with this man?

CREATE

The term ‘everyman’ is derived from a fifteenth-century English morality play titled *The Summoning of Everyman*. In this play, the ‘everyman’ was devoid of definite marks of individuality in order to create a universality in the moral message of the play. Write a story or illustrate a scene from a situation that highlights the benefits of knowing the individual as opposed to the potential danger of an anonymous figure among a crowd ‘everymen’.

CINDY SHERMAN

UNTITLED #462 2007–08



Cindy Sherman / United States b.1954 / *Untitled #462 2007–08* / Chromogenic colour print / 158.6 x 177.8 cm / Purchased 2011 with funds from Tim Fairfax, AM, through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Cindy Sherman

Cindy Sherman uses her own image in an astonishing array of character studies, developed over decades. She has collaborated with major fashion houses including Balenciaga and Chanel. The worlds of art and fashion are highly visual and they are considered to be of great cultural value. This combination sees art and fashion working in tandem as trend setters for the elite, yet both look to street culture to gain credibility. Her Balenciaga series, which includes *Untitled #462*, presents viewers with representations of socialites from New York City, wearing the brand, striving for the look, assuming a kind of street credibility to match the occasion.

LOOK

Analyse the image; remember that the artist has carefully constructed every element. Pull the composition apart by looking at the figures' body language, the background, the lighting, the clothing, the hair cuts, the glasses and the facial expressions.

THINK

1. Why do you think Sherman chooses not to title her work?
2. Imagine the lifestyles of each of these women. What is the nature of their relationship?
3. How does the combination of clothing, hair and make-up send a signal of social status?

CREATE

Become a caricature by photographing yourself living the life of someone else. Are you someone who knows one of the women in Sherman's work? Did you help them prepare for the event or were you introduced to them that night? Construct your identity within a relevant setting by using the same techniques as Sherman — clothing, make-up, lighting, Photoshop, gesture, props and facial expression.

MICHAEL COOK

CIVILISED #1, #2, #6, #10 2012



Michael Cook / Bidjara people / Australia b.1968 / *Civilised* #1, #2, #6, #10 2012 / Inkjet prints / Purchased 2012. Queensland Art Gallery / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Michael Cook

In Michael Cook's 'Civilised' series, Aboriginal Australians are dressed in the period fashions of the four European countries whose explorers visited Australia during this period. He also incorporates text from the explorers' writings and journals that recorded first contact with Indigenous people. In restaging the past, Cook opens a dialogue about the future for all Australians.

In *Civilised* #1, #2, #6, #10 Cook meticulously applies the techniques of layering filters to construct an image that invites viewers to speculate on an alternative account of Australian history. Indigenous Australian models hold each scene with strength and purpose, whilst clutching and wearing symbols of colonising cultures. Although the images are fictional, Cook's visual language powerfully highlights a profound truth about the enduring and ancient civilisations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations.

LOOK

Look firstly into the depth of the images to recognise the absence of a horizon line, the presence of text and the occasional reference to maritime exploration. Then allow yourself time to explore the interplay between the text, atmosphere, symbolism and expressions within each image.

THINK

1. How does Cook use traditional styles of European portraiture and costume to comment on contemporary ideas about culture and privileged?
2. Why do you think the artist has chosen to include texts describing firsthand accounts of European contact with Australia's Indigenous inhabitants?
3. What if Indigenous Australia was able to build upon its sovereignty without the influence of European colonisation?

CREATE

Devise a series of images by imagining a 'what if' scenario that challenges a common point of view regarding an issue that is important to you. Start by selecting an issue that you believe could be improved by a major change in current thinking (e.g. What if teenagers were elected to lead nations?). Next determine a point in time (recent or historical) when the change would be of most impact. Use photography or illustration to plan your imagery and factor in visual codes such as costuming and props.

NAIZA KHAN

ARMOUR SUIT FOR RANI OF JHANSI II 2017

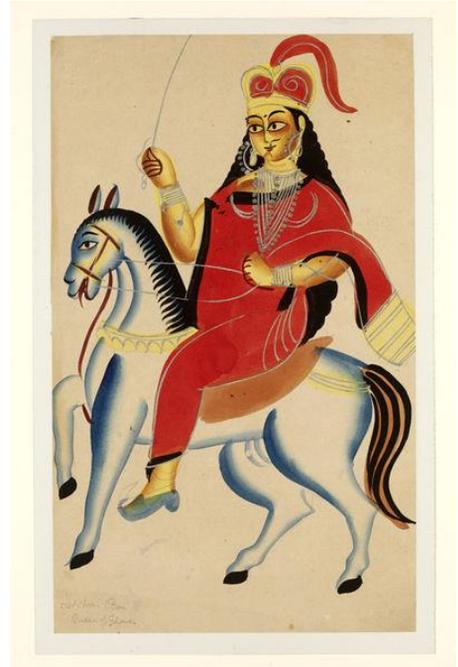


Naiza Khan / Pakistan b.1968 / *Armour Suit for Rani of Jhansi II 2017* / Galvanised steel, feathers, leather, ed. 2/2 / 88 x 40 x 32cm / Private collection / Image courtesy: Naiza Khan and Rossi & Rossi, Hong Kong | London / © Naiza Khan

Armour Suit for Rani of Jhansi II 2017 is both foreboding and beautiful — a suitable tribute to a feared Indian heroine. Naiza Kahn brings the history of armature into the contemporary context of an art gallery, shifting the European and masculine connotations of armoury to a representation of feminine strength and leadership. In recent years, female heroes have become more present in popular culture. However, as Kahn's work highlights, the truly heroic lived experiences of women are there to be discovered in the realities of contemporary society and in the too often untold histories of nations.

EXPLORE

Research depictions of Rani of Jhansi II and the Indian Rebellion. Compare Khan's armour to what was worn by the rebellion fighters in 1857.



Unknown / Kalighat, Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), India / *Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi on horseback* c.1885 / Opaque watercolour on paper / 45.2 x 27.7cm / Collection: Victoria & Albert Museum, London

THINK

1. Have you ever seen armour treated as an art object before?
2. What is the main and the secondary function of armour?
3. Imagine what it would feel like to wear Kahn's sculpture. Consider the weight and your ability to move.

CREATE

Research a female hero and design a suit of armour that pays homage to her legacy. Consider what the functions of your armour will be.

TRACEY MOFFATT

BEAUTIES (IN MULBERRY) 1997 AND *BEAUTIES (IN WINE)* 1994



Tracey Moffatt's 'Beauties' series refers to the rodeo scene that grew out of Aboriginal indentured labour in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The indentured workers took fierce pride in their cowboy skills and many became famous rodeo riders. Moffatt embraces this history; rather than viewing this period through a lens of sadness or defeat, she presents an image of her uncle dressed as a Hollywood movie-star style cowboy through a lens of beauty.

Echoing the celebrity portraits of pop artist Andy Warhol, Tracey Moffatt's uncle becomes an icon of the Indigenous Australian experience that saw oppressed workers transcend the prejudices of the time.

WATCH

[Watch](#) the 1989 episode of the ABC's *Rewind* program to hear Tracey Moffatt talk about her practice.

THINK

1. At the start of the *Rewind* video, Moffatt lists aspiration, purpose, wish, hope, and desire in relation to her 'Something more' series. Which of these terms relates to *Beauties (in mulberry)*?
2. Moffatt's practice includes photography and video. How does her knowledge and interest in film impact her photography?

CREATE

Tracey Moffatt often uses coloured filters in her photographic series. View the [QAGOMA blog](#) posts about Tracey Moffatt to see the effect applied to a range of subject matter. Take your own series of photographs of interiors, night skies or family portraits, print them out using grayscale and colour them by hand, or apply coloured filters before printing using photo editing software.

WILLIAM YANG

“MOTHER. CAIRNS, 1930’s” PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN (FROM ‘ABOUT MY MOTHER’ PORTFOLIO) 2003



William Yang / Australia b.1943 / “Mother. Cairns, 1930’s.”
Photographer unknown. (from ‘About my mother’ portfolio)
2003 / Gelatin silver photograph / 51.3 x 61.1cm /
Purchased 2004. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation
Grant / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of
Modern Art / © William Yang

The text reads: My father met my mother in Cairns and he courted her for a few years. He had a shop at Alooomba near Cairns, and in the 1930's he moved the shop to Dimbulah – a small tobacco town on the Atherton Tableland. He started the shop and then he proposed to my mother. “He wanted someone to help with the shop,” my mother told me. But at another time she said she was madly in love with my father. So I think she was in two minds here. In one, the traditional Chinese way, marriage was an economic contract, but she had been born in Australia, and had grown up seeing movies, and she allowed herself the luxury of love and romance.

William Yang’s practice is documentary in nature, in that his works archive moments, stories and histories. Yang’s relationship with his mother was complex: while he felt comforted by her unconditional love, he also felt he was only able to be fully himself after her death. Yang gives us a sense of Emma as a strong and proud woman, but we also experience his struggle to grasp his mother’s ‘true essence’ in a fleeting photograph. As a gay multicultural artist raised in Far North Queensland, Yang’s identity, as documented through his photography, is a window into an identity that is rarely seen in popular culture.

In this sense, Yang’s pursuit to document his life and willingness to share his images and experiences so generously with audiences elevates his status as an artist operating ahead of his time.

WATCH

[Watch](#) William Yang being interviewed on the ABC’s *One-Plus-One*. The episode chronicles his childhood and his life in Sydney as a documentary photographer through to his recent voyage to China which enabled him to reconcile with his heritage.

THINK

1. Compare this work with Yang’s *“Aunt Bessie and my Mother.” Cairns, 1930.* and *“Father.” Cairns, 1920’s. P.U.* How would you describe tone of Yang’s writings? What do the notes express or achieve?

2. In *One-Plus-One* speaks about his childhood in Cairns. What influence did Yang’s experience as a third generation Chinese-Australian growing up in Cairns in the 1940s and 1950s have on his early development as an artist?

2. *“Mother. Cairns, 1930’s”* uses an image that was taken before the artist’s birth in 1943. The work was created in 2003 after Yang’s mother passed away. The process of documenting the life of a close family member through photography is not uncommon. What makes Yang’s portfolio unique?

CREATE

Compile a portfolio of photographs, sketches and notes about a close family member or friend. Gather visual and written information that represents different stages of their life and aspects of their personality. As you develop your portfolio, ask questions about the person so that you can learn more about someone who you think you already know well.

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This resource has been developed by QAGOMA Learning.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

The Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land upon which the Gallery stands in Brisbane. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past and present and, in the spirit of reconciliation, acknowledge the immense creative contribution Indigenous people make to the art and culture of this country.

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