



A velvet ant, a flower and bird

Teacher Resource Pack

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the traditional custodians of the land where *A velvet ant, a flower and bird* is exhibited and accompanying resources were developed. We acknowledge and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO THE POTTER MUSEUM OF ART

The Potter is one of the homes of the University of Melbourne Art Collection, with work spanning antiquity to contemporary practice. While the principal focus of the Collection is Australian art, a range of international works include gifts from distinguished alumni and teaching collections that demonstrate the strong connections between the University's cultural collections and its academic programs. Notable for its breadth, the Collection – now numbering some 18,000 works – is uniquely connected to the University's history while also responding to our evolving cultural landscape.

Collection-based learning and art-focused education are at the heart of the University's art museums activities, including at the Potter, where they were first initiated in 2010. Our dedicated Academic Engagement and Learning Experiences staff engage and collaborate with the University's academics and students across all faculties, as well as with visiting secondary schools from across Victoria.

Through these activities encouraging active dialogue and debate, the Potter is uniquely positioned to enrich the cultural lives of its audiences.

For each Potter Museum of Art exhibition, the Learning Experiences Team creates an accompanying resource to support teachers in tailoring and extending their students' experience before, during and after a visit.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

- It is recommended that teachers read this entire pack to plan your trip to the exhibition alongside the Schools Risk Assessment.
- This resource includes artwork labels, discussion points and interdisciplinary curriculum connections to 5 key works in the exhibition.
- Before and after visit activities are recommended for students to deep dive into exhibition themes.
- VCE Art Making and Exhibiting groups are provided an additional online resource tailored for aligning units and outcomes.

CONTENTS

BEFORE THE VISIT:

PP. 5 – 6

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

KEY THEMES OF INQUIRY

WELLBEING

PREPARING FOR YOUR VISIT

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

DURING THE VISIT:

PP. 7 – 12

GALLERY INVIGILATORS

LEARNING EXPERIENCE FACILITATORS

KEY ARTWORKS AND DISCUSSION POINTS

AFTER THE VISIT:

PP. 13

RESOURCES

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

DISCUSSION POINTS

Teachers are advised that the exhibition *A velvet ant, a flower and a bird* contains stylised and abstracted nudity, sexual themes and references, mild drug references, and Egyptian burial artefacts. The works in focus on school tours have been selected to minimise explicit content.

For all enquiries, please contact us by using the following details:

Email: school-bookings@unimelb.edu.au

Phone: 03 8344 1420

Resources developed by the Potter Museum of Art Learning Experiences Team.

BEFORE THE VISIT

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

A velvet ant, a flower and a bird is a group exhibition that reenacts a 'garden of knowledge' structured around three entities. Each of these offer ways to envision intelligence as living, continually evolving, interconnected and interdependent. The ants in this exhibition might be seen as an engineer, the flowers as quantum computers processing intelligence, and the birds as data, flying out into the world.

This exhibition is guest curated by Professor Dr Chus Martínez, Head of the Institute of Art Gender Nature at the FHNW Academy of Arts and Design, Basel, Switzerland.

KEY THEMES

Contemporary art, materials and practices, Collections, Curatorial Practice, Biology, Technology, Ecosystems, Nature, Non-Human Intelligence, Physical and Digital Environments, Networks of Dependence, Connection to Country.

WELLBEING

Please note that this exhibition has a content warning and teachers should familiarise themselves with the artworks listed in the School Risk Assessment. Ask your school's wellbeing coordinator or year level coordinator if there are any students that they recommend you monitor during the exhibition visit.

PREPARING FOR YOUR VISIT

For a maximised learning experience at the Potter, teachers must properly prepare themselves and students to engage meaningfully and in culturally safe, responsive ways with *A velvet ant, a flower and a bird*. As this may be the first museum or gallery learning experience for some educators and students, it is especially helpful to explore expectations and discuss what to anticipate beforehand. Below are some preparatory questions educators can use to open and guide this discussion with students:

- What does respect look, sound and feel like?
- What makes a curious question a respectful question?
- What does it mean to listen and respond with an open mind?
- Offer time for students to explore the case studies in class – What are their initial thoughts about what we will explore and learn about with them?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

SEE, THINK, WONDER

As a class, watch the video recording of Ingela Ihrman's [Waterlily Amazonica 2026](#) performance. Play the video again, and invite students to write what they objectively see, what they think is going on, and one question about the artwork.

HUMAN BAROMETER

Students are presented with a thought-provoking prompt. In response, they stand along a continuum from left (agree) to right (disagree). Once they have decided where to stand, you can ask students to explain their reasoning. Use the following prompts and scenarios in preparation for the exhibition:

- Technology plays a detrimental role in society
- Intelligence is a more-than-human phenomenon
- Contemporary artists engage with personal perspectives
- Any medium or technology can be used by contemporary artists

I USED TO THINK, NOW I THINK

Create a class Miro board or ask students to create a mind map using the following questions. Students answer the following questions before and after their excursion to the exhibition using different colour sticky notes or pens. Their learning outcomes from the excursion will become visible through the growth and development of their ideas.

- What is the purpose of exhibition making?
- How many art making mediums can you list?
- What technologies could contemporary artists use?

DURING THE VISIT

GALLERY ATTENDANTS

Serving as the public face of the museum, the Potter's Gallery Attendants are passionate about our exhibitions and are keen to discuss ideas and artworks with our visitors. You and your students are welcome and encouraged to engage with our friendly Gallery Attendants during your museum excursion.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE FACILITATORS

If your school is participating in a facilitated gallery tour or workshop, you will meet our team of Learning Experience Facilitators. These young people have been trained in educational facilitation, workshop development and art communication to co-develop and co-deliver high quality learning experiences in a peer-to-peer model. We encourage students to ask our Facilitators about their experiences studying and working in the creative industries to discover where a career in the arts may take them.

Daphne Mohajer va Pesaran

**Born Ottawa, Canada
1984, lives in Naarm, Melbourne**

Solar rope 2026, handmade washi paper, dye, calico, pins

DESCRIPTION

Daphne Mohajer va Pesaran's practice revolves around paper as a resilient, sustainable and political material. Paper is an ancient technology and a keeper of memory and imagination – born in China more than two thousand years ago and carried across cultures as a medium for writing, ritual, clothing and exchange. This new piece – a second skin over an existing architectural feature – is a layered, plant-like construction echoing paper's role as an intermediary between the natural and human worlds. Each colour-saturated piece recalls petals, leaves, and the internal architectures of flowers. As the shapes are superposed, they form a vertical organism that seems to grow upward – part dress, part spine, part devotional object.

The interplay of overlapping forms produces a sense of movement, as though the piece were continually reorganising itself. It recalls the intuitive processes of folding, unfolding and hybridising that shape both paper usage and natural growth, while also invoking the logic of totems or talismanic structures.

QUESTIONS

- This artwork traverses all three floors of the gallery. How do you think the artwork connects to the exhibition's overarching theme?
- Consider the materials used to create this artwork. How might environmental factors such as humidity and temperature effect this artwork over time?



Installation view, *A velvet ant, a flower and a bird*, Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne, 2026. Featuring Daphne Mohajer va Pesaran, *Solar rope*, 2026. Photography by Christian Capurro.

CURRICULUM LINKS

- Design and Technologies
- Science
- Visual Arts (7-10)
- VCE Art Making and Exhibiting
- VCE Creative Practice

Mia Boe

Butchulla and Burmese ancestry, born 1997, lives in Naarm, Melbourne

The Aboriginal robot 2025, acrylic on linen

The story 2025, acrylic on linen

DESCRIPTION

In these two canvases Mia Boe reflects on the long-standing exclusion of Aboriginal and Indigenous intelligences from the technological and digital development and the systems that shape a great part of today's contemporary life. With sharp wit and a satirical edge, Boe stages a conversation between ancestral knowledge and the so-called 'advances' of the modern world, exposing how Western frameworks often overlook the depth, sophistication and futurity embedded in Indigenous ways of knowing.

The paintings originate on Boe's characteristic blend of humour and critique: familiar symbols of data, machinery or bureaucratic logic collide with figures, spirits and stories tied to Country. Through this juxtaposition, the work challenges viewers to recognise Aboriginal intelligence not as a relic of the past or a metaphor, but as a vital form of knowledge capable of informing – and redirecting – the futures we build.

QUESTIONS

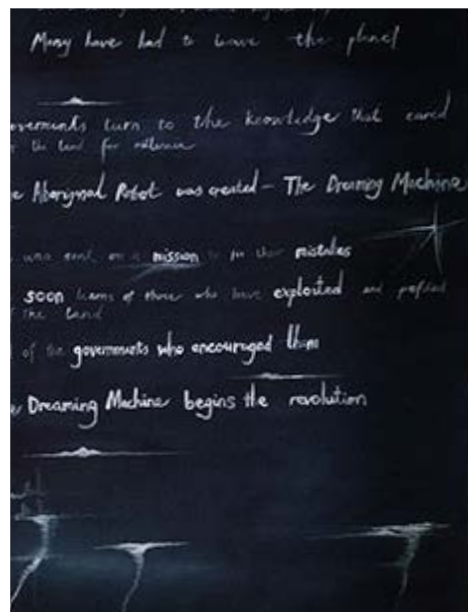
- How can the genre of science fiction provide us with insights about our current, real world? Can art function in a similar way?
- How can First Nations' knowledges of Country be respectfully and positively applied to our collective future?

CURRICULUM LINKS

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
- VCE Literature
- Visual Arts (7-10)
- VCE Art Making and Exhibiting
- VCE Creative Practice



Mia Boe, *The Aboriginal Robot*, 2025. Art Gallery of Western Australia, purchased through The Art Gallery of Western Australia *Foundation: TomorrowFund*, 2025. Photography by Christian Capurro.



Mia Boe, *The story*, 2025. Art Gallery of Western Australia, purchased through The Art Gallery of Western Australia *Foundation: TomorrowFund*, 2025. Photography by Christian Capurro.

Ingela Ihrman

Born Kalmar, Sweden 1985, lives in Stockholm, Sweden

Giant Waterlily Victoria Amazonica 2012, wood, textile, scent and glue

DESCRIPTION

Ingela Ihrman's flower works transform familiar botanical forms into large, embodied presences. Made from textiles, papier-mâché and handcrafted skins, her flowers are not costumes but alternate bodies or forms she steps into, to inhabit the life of a plant from within. By becoming a bud, a bloom, or a species with unusual reproductive behaviour, Ihrman explores how the agency, desire and complexity of plants often goes unnoticed.

Her choice of species is deliberate. She gravitates toward flowers whose biology unsettles human expectations: self-fertile passionflowers, giant waterlilies that trap their pollinators, plants whose dramatic cycles of opening and closing hinge on scent, timing and vulnerability. These botanical 'exceptions' expose the limitations of viewing nature as passive, decorative or powerless.

Through slow, meticulous making and embodied performance, Ihrman invites viewers to imagine what it might mean to feel, move and respond as a plant. The flowers become soft architectures of thought – structures through which to consider humility, interdependence and the possibility of becoming other. They suggest that agency can take many forms, and that life perceived as still or delicate may in fact be dynamic, strategic and full of force.



Installation view, *A velvet ant, a flower and a bird*, Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne, 2026. Featuring Ingela Ihrman, *Waterlily Amazonica* 2012, and *Amorphophallus titanium*, 2013. Photography by Christian Capurro.

QUESTIONS

- [Watch the artist's performance.](#)
- What art elements and art principles has Ingela Ihrman used in these flower works, and how do these contribute to her practice's aim to 'understand, question or express certain aspects of being alive'?
- What are some challenges of being a performance artist, or being an institution who wants to exhibit or collect performance art? How might you overcome these challenges?

CURRICULUM LINKS

- Science
- Design and Technologies
- Visual Arts (7-10)
- VCE Art Making and Exhibiting
- VCE Creative Practice

Gracia Haby and Louise Jennison

Born Naarm, Melbourne 1975, lives in Naarm, Melbourne

Specimen 1963 2026 paper

DESCRIPTION

Gracia Haby and Louise Jennison's work is a newly commissioned for this exhibition, dedicated to the velvet ants of Australia. A series of suspended folding screens compose a digital collage rooted in the artists' long-standing practice with natural-history research, paper, print and collage. The format allows them to conceive a pedagogical, narrative work that integrates rare book natural history illustrations and science, while also reflecting on their ongoing engagement with nature and biodiversity.

The format has a function: it becomes a handmade transmission machine. Fold by fold, panel by panel, Haby and Jennison tell and show moments in the history and behaviour of a given species – the velvet ant. Engagement, commitment, and the desire that all of us might participate more actively in the lives of animals and plants, animate a practice that insists on better, more attentive forms of coexistence.

QUESTIONS

- The velvet ant has been the subject of much scientific study and illustrations, but has not been the subject of much art or literature. Why do you think it is important to tell her story in the exhibition?
- This is the largest book the artists have ever made. How does scale influence the viewer's relationship to the collage imagery in the work?



Installation view, *A velvet ant, a flower and a bird*, Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne, 2026. Featuring Gracia Haby and Louise Jennison, *Specimen 1963*, 2026. Photography by Christian



Close up of the velvet ant in Gracia Haby and Louise Jennison, *Specimen 1963*, 2026. Photography by Christian Capurro.

CURRICULUM LINKS

- Science
- Design and technologies
- History
- Visual Arts (7-10)
- VCE Art Making and Exhibiting
- VCE Creative Practice

Naomi Hobson

**Southern Kwangju / Umpila, born 1979,
lives in Coen, Queensland**

Rare 2025, inkjet print on cotton rag, MECCA Collection. Copyright Naomi Hobson

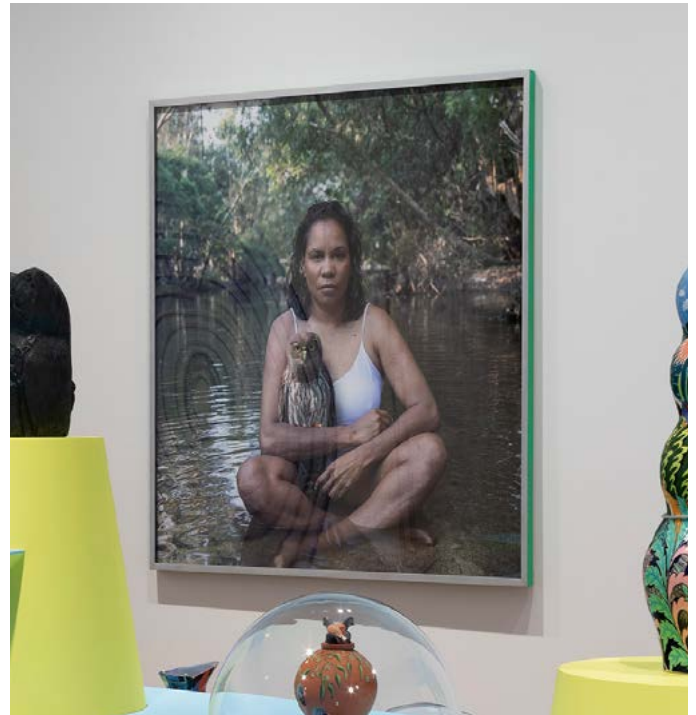
DESCRIPTION

In this rare self-portrait, artist Naomi Hobson appears holding a Barking Owl or Ngurku – an animal embedded in the stories and ecosystems of Coen, her homeland in Far North Queensland. Hobson's practice often interweaves a study of the landscape with the stories and kinship systems that have shaped her as a Kaantju and Umpila woman and her community. The owl is here both a companion and an image of natural guidance and impressive intuition.

The genuine calm that the owl and artist appear to share enhances their bond – with the owl's alert gaze and the artist's quiet confidence inviting viewers to participate in this special and living relationship. The work reflects Hobson's ongoing commitment to expressing Indigenous identity in a contemporary visual language that is unapologetically personal. Through this self-portrait, Hobson reaffirms her connection to the natural world and asserts the importance of stories carried not only by people, but by the animals and environments that sustain them.

QUESTIONS

- Naomi Hobson's practice highlights her deep connection to the traditional homelands of her ancestors surrounding the town of Coen in Queensland. Do you think the common saying 'a picture is worth 1000 words' can be applied to *Rare*? What does this work tell us about the artist's connection to Country?



Installation view, *A velvet ant, a flower and a bird*, Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne, 2026. Featuring Naomi Hobson, *Rare*, inkjet print on cotton rag, 2025, from the MECCA Collection. Photography by Christian Capurro

CURRICULUM LINKS

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross Curriculum Priority
- Visual Arts (7-10)
- VCE Art Making and Exhibiting
- VCE Creative Practice

AFTER THE VISIT

Debriefing on the excursion provides a valuable opportunity to reflect on the students' learning. Teachers are encouraged to leave ample time to facilitate discussion about what students learned and experienced at the Potter.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Which works stood out to you most and why? How do they relate to the broader themes of the exhibition?
- What connections to other subject areas did you come across?
- Were there any artworks or concepts that you found challenging, and why?
- How does the exhibition design balance the need to protect the works with audience access and aesthetic considerations?
- The curator said her aim is to 'motivate' visitors. What do you think she means by that statement?

ACTIVITIES

I USED TO THINK, NOW I THINK

Make your students learning visible. Refer to the class Miro board or mind-map made before the visit. Invite students to add new responses to the board using another colour sticky note or pen. As a class, reflect on the learnings from the exhibition and growth of their understanding around the below questions:

- What is the purpose of exhibition making?
- How many art making mediums can you list?
- What technologies could contemporary artists use?

RESOURCES

- Watch this [Gardening Australia](#) video where artist-duo Gracia and Louise discuss their artmaking practice and volunteer work as wildlife carers.
- Visit our [online VCE Resource](#) to access rich audio-visual and text-based information about the exhibition, artists, and curatorial process.

POTTER
MUSEUM
OF ART

