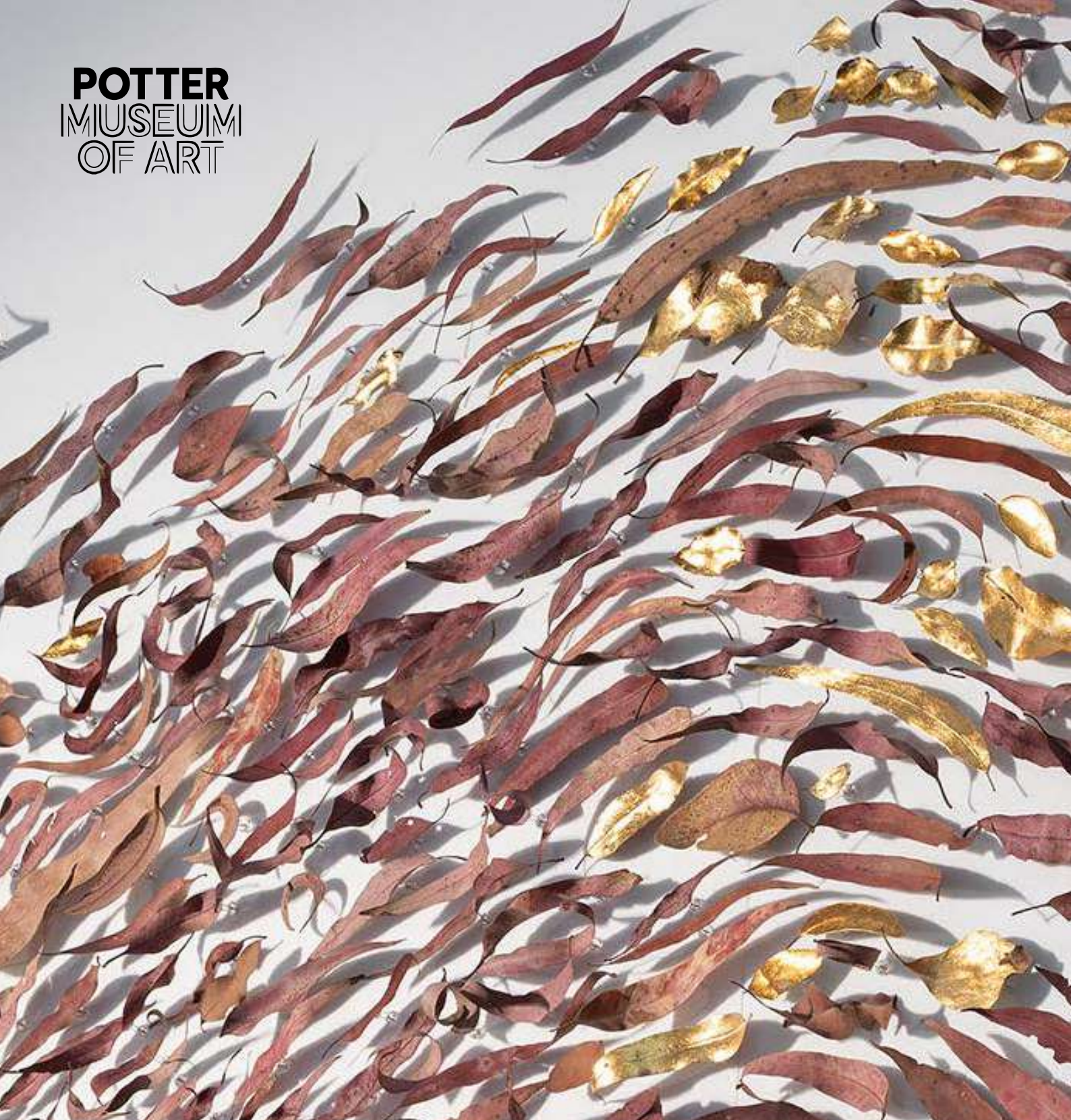




*Ngarn Wa'ngal:
Art of the gum tree*

TEACHER RESOURCE PACK

We acknowledge the
Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people
as the traditional custodians
of the land where the *Ngarn
Wa'ngal: Art of the gum tree*
exhibition and accompanying
resources were developed and

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 the student 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.

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SCHOOLS EXHIBITION CONTENT ADVISORY MESSAGE

Gum trees have stood on the lands of Traditional Custodians for countless generations. They are part of living, breathing Country that was never ceded. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and to the enduring knowledge systems that continue to be practised, maintained and shared across this continent, despite great adversity.

Throughout this exhibition, some of the words and works of art reflect the history and the attitudes of the time in which they were written or created.

Some of the works of art in this exhibition refer to the displacement and massacre of First Nations peoples, as well as environmental destruction and catastrophic events including bushfires.

Nudity is depicted in one of the gallery spaces, and some artworks have sensory considerations, including scents and audiovisual elements.

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

Ngarn Wa'ngal: Art of the gum tree explores the eucalypt as a source of creative inspiration in Australian art. 'Ngarn wa'ngal' is Woi Wurrung for 'breathing for us', a title that recognises the intrinsic relationship between trees and people. From dense forests, open plains, sub-alpine mountains and arid deserts to our cities and suburbs, the gum tree connects us to this land and shapes who we are.

Over three floors, this exhibition traces the gum tree across art and culture: as a living being central to First Nations identity, an unfamiliar tree of fascination to early European botanists, a witness to the impacts of colonisation, a symbol of national identity, and a familiar backdrop to our daily lives. It also presents artistic responses to the environmental threats facing eucalypts today, and to their resilience. Together, the works of art encourage reflection on Indigenous sovereignty, Australian identity, our environment and climate, as well as the reach of the gum tree beyond this continent.

Eucalypts are indigenous to Australia, with over 900 identified species and subspecies – from towering giants and gnarled ancients to delicate multi-trunked mallees and hardy shrubs. Some eucalypts, like the river red gum, are found throughout much of the country, while many species grow naturally only in restricted areas. A small number of species cross over to Southeast Asia, New Guinea and New Britain, with fewer than five species endemic outside Australia. The gum trees that grow elsewhere

– now on every continent except Antarctica – are the result of human distribution in recent centuries.

The European taxonomic classification 'eucalyptus' – from the Greek for 'well-covered', describing the capped flower buds – was first used in 1788. Eucalypts are divided into several genera, notably *Eucalyptus*, *Angophora*, *Corymbia* and the recently proposed *Blakella*. For this exhibition, the over-arching name 'gum tree' is used for all eucalypts. However, these trees have many names: taxonomic, such as *Eucalyptus viminalis*; common, including manna gum, ghost gum and stringybark; and age-old: wurun, biyal, wirrangga, pilpira, purnu, gadayka, karri, mottlecuh, coolabah, jarrah and hundreds more.

This exhibition draws upon the University of Melbourne's collections together with significant local and interstate loans.

KEY THEMES

Indigenous sovereignty, Australian identity, our environment and climate, as well as the reach of the gum tree beyond this continent.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- We've signposted which areas of the curriculum relate to each exhibit, however, connections can be drawn to many curriculum areas.
- As subject matter experts, we encourage teachers to use these as a starting point.
- If you have an specific curriculum goal in mind, have a chat to our team at the time of booking so we can highlight these works during your learning experience.

WELLBEING

Please note that this exhibition has a content warning and teachers should familiarise themselves with the artworks in this resource. Ask your school's wellbeing coordinator or year level coordinator if there are any students that they recommend you monitor at *Ngarn Wa'ngal: Art of the gum tree*.

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 *Ngarn Wa'ngal: Art of the gum tree*. 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 this short video](#) of a seedball making workshop with multidisciplinary artist Dean Cross. 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.

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.

- *How many art making mediums can you list?*
- *What are some ways galleries conserve artworks for display?*
- *What organic materials can be used for artmaking?*
- *Why might artists make works about gum trees and the natural environment?*

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:

- Gum trees only grow in Australia
- Only inorganic materials are used to make art
- Contemporary artists engage with environmental issues
- Any medium or technology can be used by contemporary artists

DURING THE VISIT

GALLERY ATTENDANTS

Serving as the public face of the museum, the Potter Museum'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 Attendants during your museum excursion during times where it is appropriate to do so.

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.

megan evans

Australian, born 1957

Gust, 2026

eucalyptus leaves, plastic and metal pins



DESCRIPTION

"Gust is made of hundreds of multicoloured eucalyptus leaves gathered over a thirty-year period. It follows the design of the wind as it moves up the stairs. The black leaves at the climax of the gust are from burnt trees around my mother's house in Chum Creek, which was in the centre of the Black Saturday bushfires... I have collected most of the leaves from Boonwurrung Country, where I live, while others have come from Melbourne University campuses across Victoria." – megan evans



QUESTIONS

- On which traditional land is your school located and what species of eucalypt can be found there? How do their leaves differ in colour, shape and size?
- How does *Gust* connect to the theme of the exhibition and how does it physically and metaphorically connect the three levels of the gallery?
- What are the conservation considerations for exhibiting organic materials such as burnt gum leaves?
- What are the conservation risks posed by organic materials in galleries?



CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

VCE Art Making and Exhibiting

VCE Creative Practice

Levels 7-10 Visual Arts, Science, Geography

Jazz Money

Wiradjuri, born 1992

in embrace, 2026

single-channel digital video, colour, sound, 42:00 min; vinyl



DESCRIPTION

Jazz Money is a Wiradjuri poet, artist and filmmaker whose cross-disciplinary practice is rooted in language, narrative and First Nations legacies of place. Through poetry and art, Money honours the past while carrying responsibility into the future, sustaining the oral traditions of First Nations storytelling – a living instrument of care on and for this continent.

in embrace is a floor-based poem accompanied by a moving image of rising smoke, opening the exhibition's first room dedicated to First Nations perspectives. Money's voice can be heard softly reading their poem.

In many First Nations cultures, including the artist's Wiradjuri culture, smoke is used to mark moments of ceremony and significance. Here they are inspired by the act of welcoming a new baby to the world with the burning of green gum leaves.

QUESTIONS

- How does the artist express her cultural identity and connection to Country?
- What art elements and principles can be used to describe the rising smoke shown in the single-channel digital video part of the artwork?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

VCE Art Making and Exhibiting

VCE Creative Practice

VCE Literature

Levels 7-10 English, Media Arts, Visual Arts, Intercultural Capability

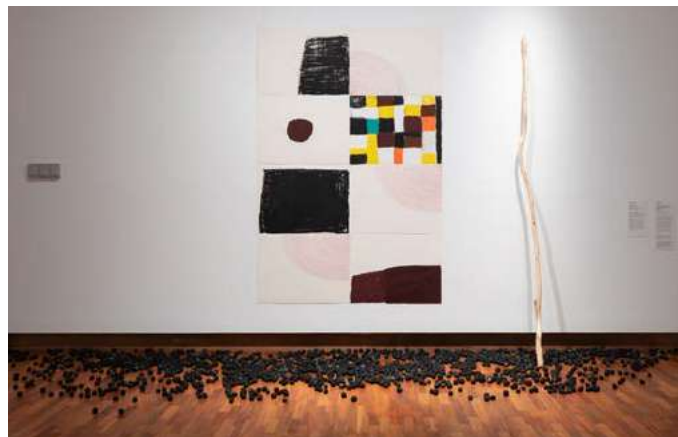
Cross-curriculum Priorities Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

Dean Cross

Worimi, born 1986

There are 1000 ways to change the world, but you only need one, 2026

paper, ink, flour, water, manna gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) seeds



DESCRIPTION

An artist of Worimi descent, Dean Cross will present *There are 1000 ways to change the world, but you only need one*, an installation of balls holding the seeds of a manna gum, encased in paper pulp designed to break down and help the seeds germinate. At the close of this exhibition, they will be returned to Country. Referencing the Birrarung landscape and the vulnerability of eucalypt species under climate change, the work reflects themes of regeneration and ecological futures.

"I am often struck by the incomprehensibility of the scale of the universe. It feels deliberate, necessary. Like a protective cloak shielding my small human mind from imploding. I wonder if a eucalypt seed feels the same way." – Dean Cross.

QUESTIONS

- How does this artwork bridge art and activism? In what ways can art contribute to environmental activism?
- What scientific knowledge informs the idea behind this artwork?
- How can First Nations' knowledges of Country be respectfully and positively applied to our collective future?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

VCE Art Making and Exhibiting

VCE Creative Practice

VCE Environmental Science

Levels 7-10 Media Arts, Visual Arts, Science

Cross-curriculum Priorities Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Sustainability

Janet Laurence

Australian, born 1947

An Incantation for a Eucalypt, 2026

eucalypt wood, bark, seeds, seedlings, oils, paper,
glass, carbon pigments and photomedia



DESCRIPTION

An Incantation for a Eucalypt is a layered installation by leading Australian artist Janet Laurence, whose practice examines our physical, cultural and conflicting relationship to the natural world.

“To bring you the wonder and the world of a tree. Here is a gathering together of images, stories, matter, and fragments of our beloved eucalyptus trees. Eucalyptus wood is transformed into a rough cabinet to house archival materials and rare books from The University of Melbourne along with tree oils and essences from the Victorian Herbarium. Botanical fragments and objects from the forest and my studio weave into these collections, creating the incantation and the alchemical transformation of nature into art.”
- Janet Lawrence

QUESTIONS

- How has Lawrence created the work? Consider her use of materials, processes and techniques.
- What is an incantation and how does the artwork's title inform our interpretation of the work itself?
- What materials are from the natural world and what scientific disciplines or knowledges do they connect to?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

VCE Art Making and Exhibiting

VCE Creative Practice

Levels 7-10 Science, Visual Arts, History

Dianne Jones

Ballardong, Noongar, born 1966

The hidden, 2011

inkjet print on paper



DESCRIPTION

Photographed on York Reserve on Ballardong Noongar Country, Jones's haunting image captures the ritual of caregivers hiding children among the protective gums, out of the sight of 'welfare' officials who came to remove Aboriginal children from their families.

"This image is about the stories from my Mum of her experience of being aware of a 'lookout' for the welfare car. Whenever it was seen there was fear and terror and the response was to call out to the children 'Balay Nyidyang' which meant 'watch out – white people' and then yell and encourage running, hiding because they were coming to take the children."

– Dianne Jones

QUESTIONS

- What role does colour play in the photograph?
- How does the artist communicate fear and protection?
- What parts of Jones' mother's story are included and not included in the scene?
- Why do you think Jones chose to share an intergenerational story about the Stolen Generation?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

VCE Art Making and Exhibiting

VCE Creative Practice

Levels 7-10 Visual Arts, Media Arts, Ethical Capability

Cross-curriculum Priorities Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

John Glover

English, 1767–1849, lived in
Australia 1831–49

Patterdale landscape with cattle, 1833
oil on canvas



DESCRIPTION

Already an accomplished artist of high repute, John Glover arrived in Van Diemens Land (Lutruwita / Tasmania) on his 64th birthday to ‘take up’ land with his family. Glover is often criticised for his depiction of unnaturally sinuous gums. Yet this and other paintings, together with numerous tiny sketches he made of black or swamp gums (*Eucalyptus ovata*) and white or manna gums (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) growing on his property Patterdale, show that he developed a deep knowledge of the gums’ distinctive shapes, and chose when to depict them naturalistically and when more romantically. Here, the open grassland between the trees that so appealed to British sensibilities and pastoral ambitions is evidence of centuries of cultural burning. The colonists had little understanding or appreciation of this sustainable practice.

QUESTIONS

- How does Glover’s depiction of gums differ to realistic characteristics of gums? Consider the artist’s use of form, line and colour.
- What are the different land management approaches of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and colonial settlers?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

VCE Art Making and Exhibiting

VCE Creative Practice

VCE Environmental Science

Level 7-10 Visual Art, History, Science

Cross-curriculum Priorities Sustainability

Joan Ross

Scottish/Australian

Colonial grab, 2015

single-channel digital video animation, colour, sound,
07:32 min, sound and animation: Josh Raymond



DESCRIPTION

“In this video we play the poker machine aptly named ‘Colonial grab’. Through this game we look at colonisation and its legacies, globalisation, consumerism, ownership, environment, and greed.

The odds tho, always in the House’s favour.

In my favourite scene, whole trees, from John Glover’s nineteenth-century painting, with the Indigenous peoples still in them, are plucked and arranged, Ikebana-style, by a colonial woman wearing signature hi-vis, in an act of total disregard and disrespect, reflective of the times, and in my opinion clearly apparent in the twenty-first century.”

– Joan Ross

Throughout this animation we can hear the hum of people in a club, poker machines, crows, magpies and currawongs calling, insects buzzing and droning, footsteps, fire crackling, glass shattering and ambient bush sounds.

QUESTIONS

- How has colonisation impacted the Australian landscape and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
- Identify parts of the artwork that draw from history, and those that refer to contemporary society. Why do you think Ross connects colonial history to the present?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

VCE Art Making and Exhibiting

VCE Creative Practice

Levels 7-10 Media Arts, Visual Arts, Intercultural Capability

Hossein Valamanesh

Iranian/Australian, 1949–2022

Nesting, 2005

digital print on paper



DESCRIPTION

Hossein Valamanesh emigrated from Iran in his mid twenties. During his long career, his practice evocatively expressed the sense of duality, or schism, that can come with carrying one's culture and way of being in one's heart. He often appears in his work in the form of a silhouette or shadow, as a kind of Everyman. In this photograph the artist is wholly present, physically and metaphorically embodying the challenge of trying to 'nest' in a new land, with its upside-down seasons, strange flora and fauna, and vastly different customs.

QUESTIONS

- How has the artist constructed this scene? Consider the artist's use of materials, techniques and processes.
- Valamanesh emigrated to Australia from Iran in the 1970s. What symbols does he use to communicate the duality of his cultural identity?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

VCE Art Making and Exhibiting

VCE Creative Practice

Levels 7-10 Media Arts, Visual Arts, Intercultural Capability

Jane E. Brown

British/Australian, born 1967

Corymbia ficifolia from the series 1,8-Cineole, 2006
composite of 4 silver gelatin photograph (printed with eucalyptus oil)

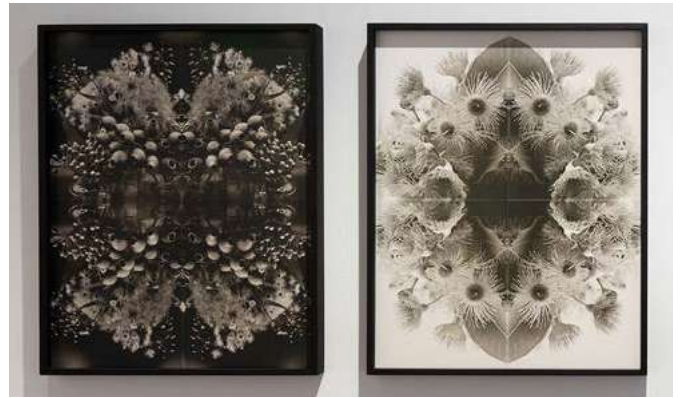
Silver princess (Eucalyptus caesia) Violet Street Photosynthetic from the series 1,8-Cineole, 2026
composites of 4 toned silver gelatin photographs (printed with eucalyptus oil)

DESCRIPTION

Corymbia ficifolia and *Silver princess (Eucalyptus caesia)* are two works from the 2026 commissioned series 1,8-Cineole. These gelatin silver photographs were made in response to the photography of Russell Grimwade (1879-1955), who was a scientist, businessman and philanthropist with wide ranging interests embracing industry, botany and art. In particular, Brown researched his glass-plate negatives and carbon prints made for *An Anthography of the Eucalypts* and in response created a series of experimental photographs of gum blossoms and gumnuts. Remarkably, Brown found a way to print her photographs using eucalyptus oil as the developing agent, inspiring the title of the series 1,8-Cineole, which is the chemical name for eucalyptol, the primary compound found in eucalyptus oil.

QUESTIONS

- Brown responds to the photography of scientist, businessman, and artist Russell Grimwade, and found a way to use eucalyptus oil to develop her photographs. How do her artworks communicate ideas of scientific inquiry? Consider the artist's use of form, balance, repetition and contrast.
- This exhibition presents a vast array of approaches to depicting and utilising gum trees for art making. How might you include gum trees, leaves, bark or oil in an artwork of your own? What medium would you use to create the work?



CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

VCE Art Making and Exhibiting

VCE Creative Practice

Levels 7-10 Media Arts, Visual Arts, Science, Creative and Critical Thinking

John Gollings

Australian, born 1944

877.00M E 145° 12' 31.12' S 037° 25' 15.95' from the series *Black Saturday*, 2009, reprinted 2012

digital print on paper



DESCRIPTION

The Black Saturday bushfires burnt across Victoria on 7 February 2009 and for weeks after. Ignited by as many as 400 separate outbreaks, these fires resulted in a disastrous loss of life, with 173 people killed and 414 injured, along with innumerable animals, reptiles, birds and other creatures. Julia Gillard, then Deputy Prime Minister, described the event as 'a tragedy beyond belief, beyond precedent and beyond words'. Following this devastation, John Gollings took a series of aerial photographs of the Kinglake and Marysville region, showing the catastrophic impact to the land, with scorched tree trunks patterning the denuded hills. With a maximum of 46.4°C, 7 February 2009 remains the hottest day on record in Melbourne.

QUESTIONS

- Why might the artist have chosen to photograph the decimated landscape from above? What role does scale and perspective play in our interpretation of the work?
- How might personal and cultural perspectives of the Black Saturday bushfires influence a viewer's interpretation of the photograph?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

VCE Art Making and Exhibiting

VCE Creative Practice

Levels 7-10 Media Arts, Visual Arts, Science, Personal and Social Capability

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?

ACTIVITY

I used to think, now I think: Using the class Miro board or mind map prepared before the visit, ask students to reflect on the same questions using different colour sticky notes or pens. Their learning outcomes from the excursion will become visible through the growth and development of their ideas.

- *How many art making mediums can you list?*
- *What are some ways galleries conserve artworks for display?*
- *What organic materials can be used for artmaking?*
- *Why might artists make works about gum trees and the natural environment?*

Resources

[Learn about each of the rooms in Ngarn Wa'ngal: Art of the gum tree.](#)



POTTER
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