

CHAOS & ORDER EDUCATION

13 APRIL -
9 JUNE



Juz Kitson, *Founded on the belief that there is order* (2017)
Jingdezhen porcelain, Southern Ice porcelain, Physical vapour deposition, beetle wings, rabbit pelt, wild goat hide, resin, silicone, bone, treated pine and marine ply. 130.0 x 75.0 x 30.0 cm
RMIT University Art Collection
Image courtesy of the artist and Jan Murphy Gallery

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Introduction

Chaos & Order celebrates over 80 Australian and international artists in an ambitious survey of the RMIT Art Collection. A riot of painting, sculpture, photography, sound and new media, the exhibition embraces the contradictions inherent in public art collections.

Besides being a showcase for the work of alumni and staff, who rank among the most highly-regarded artists the country has produced, the intended purpose of the RMIT art collection is to tell the story of the university, its ideals and aspirations.

Chaos & Order takes this broad remit, and demonstrates the impossibility of a definitive narrative that accurately traces the evolution of artistic style, thought and technique across decades and generations. Instead, it encourages comparison and suggests visual, poetic, thematic, and emotional relationships between works created over the past 100 years.

The Chaos & Order education kit has been designed specifically for VCE Art and Studio Arts students completing units 1 – 4. It highlights the relevance of the exhibition Chaos & Order to key objectives and learning outcomes of the curriculum.

Through providing an in depth analysis and context for six exhibition art works, this kit

will assist students in formulating their skills of critical inquiry and visual analysis. These broad frameworks serve as a source of inspiration for students to begin thinking about their own artistic practice and creative ideas while simultaneously highlighting the depth of analysis and research required by students studying VCE and tertiary subjects.

Discussion of the RMIT Art Collection and roles at RMIT Gallery in the education kit will broaden students' understandings of contemporary art contexts and the inner workings of the art industry.

Chaos & Order is a valuable exhibition for high school, VCE and tertiary students. To make a booking please contact RMIT Gallery on (03) 9925 1717.

Chaos & Order runs at RMIT Gallery from 13 April to 9 June 2018.

RMIT University Art Collection App

We are proud to announce the launch of a new app that helps visitors to RMIT Gallery learn more about the RMIT University Art Collection.

Using your device's bluetooth and location data, this app presents a list of objects in the nearby vicinity within the exhibition. Click on the artwork that interests you to learn about it's structural and cultural frameworks.

We recommend that VCE students download the app before visiting the gallery - that way they can interact with the exhibition information during their visit.

Download the free app now from the App Store, iTunes or Google Play.

<https://itunes.apple.com/au/app/rmit-university-art-collection/id1364248124?mt=8>

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.axiell.OnyxRMITArtCollection>

<http://onelink.to/vgt4dc>



Exhibition Themes

In Chaos & Order, the work of more than 100 artists is presented over two floors - a difficult task for any curator! It is up to the curator to decide what works to include in the exhibition and how to display those works in a coherent and stimulating way for the viewer.

Chaos & Order critiques the role of the gallery/museum as an arbitrator of history, aesthetic value and interpretation. It exposes, and revels in, the chaos underlying the systems of order.

Although the concept of chaos is an umbrella theme for this exhibition - it is certainly not random. The exhibition has been developed around motifs that have emerged as dominant ideas within the collection. Each gallery space represents a different theme.

Gallery 1: Form (shape, space, gesture, and time)

Gallery 2 & 3: The Self (the body, identity, gender, and race)

Gallery 4: Protest (social realism, dissent, outrage)

Gallery 5: The Other (the unknown, the surreal, the uncanny, death, the sublime)

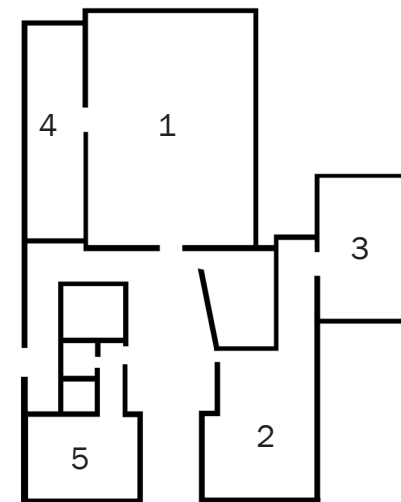
Basement: Place (landscape, urban versus natural environments, home, and belonging)

Questions for student discussion:

Do you notice any surprising relationships between works as you walk through the exhibition?

Choose an artwork. Does the placement of the work emphasise any themes or elements of visual language?

If you were curating an exhibition at RMIT Gallery how would you use the gallery spaces to create a coherent exhibition?



Map of RMIT Gallery spaces 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5. The basement is a temporary space and is not included on the map.

Chaos & Order

The paradox of collections.

It's a question that seldom gets asked: what are art collections for, and who gets to make that decision? Even a cursory examination of history leads to some unavoidable conclusions: that despite many instances of good intent, art collections are expressions of power, cultural dominance and identity – usually Western, wealthy and male.

They are also a paradox. They define their contents according to strict classifications (chronology, style, or media, for example) but may hold artworks that fall outside any but the broadest interpretation of these categories. They strive to be encyclopaedic, but are frequently defined by what they have failed to acquire. Just as often, curiosities that fall outside the stated ambit of a collection prove to be its great successes: serendipity uncovers many hidden treasures. Chaos underlies the myth of order.

For art collections to be relevant and democratic, they need to embrace this dichotomy. Chaos & Order demonstrates the impossibility of a single definitive narrative that accurately traces the evolution of artistic thought and technique across decades, cultures and generations. Instead, it suggests poetic, thematic, and emotional relationships between works created over the past 120 years, placing them within five broad themes: the self, the other,

form, protest and place.

Although the RMIT Art Collection dates back to the university's establishment in 1887, it was not until the 1970s that the university started actively building its collection. In this period, RMIT acquired works by significant Australian artists, such as John Brack, Roger Kemp and Leonard French. The RMIT Art Collection grew in other ways – through joining with other institutions and amalgamating collections and receiving generous donations of art and resources.

The past decade has seen a shift in the way RMIT University has collected art. The collection now functions as a public cultural resource representative of the RMIT motto “a skilled hand, a cultivated mind” and includes work by important contemporary artists, including many who have taught or studied at the university.

The collection comprises more than 1500 works that are exhibited in RMIT Gallery programs, displayed around the campus and loaned to other Australian and international institutions. With such a diverse collection, the paradox of chaos and order is ubiquitous.

When works within the RMIT Art Collection aren't on display or on loan, they have to be

stored. RMIT has two places for storing the collection – a small secure unit on site in the gallery and an off-site facility in Bundoora. The main considerations for conserving the collection in storage are temperature, humidity, light and pest control. Storing the collection is a holistic endeavour, as art works can have a significant impact on each other. For example particle board, which was cheap and popular in the 1970s, releases gas and different types of plastic can't be stored in proximity to each other as doing so may accelerate the deterioration of the materials.

Penny Byrne on why it is positive to be included in public art collections:

“Because it means (the artwork is) going to be looked after, and that's a great thing. It's safe and it's accessible, and it means that it can be curated into other shows relatively easily, just by putting in a request. And there's the infrastructure to facilitate that, and that's really good. The flip side is when work ends up in private collections. It can often just disappear.”

Professional Roles at RMIT Gallery

Questions for student discussion:

RMIT University has a public art collection and gallery. What other institutions manage a public art collection?

Why is it important for a university to have a gallery and an art collection?

If your art was in a public collection how would you like it to be accessed and presented? What are the Australian public art collections you would like to be included in?

If you started a collection, what would be its focus? How does an individual collector or institution decide the parameters for collecting art?

Who can access the art in a public collection? When the art in a collection isn't being exhibited, where does it go?

RMIT Gallery has a small team of permanent staff who work collaboratively to run the gallery, maintain the RMIT art collection and provide students and the public with an engaging exhibition program. There are also casual staff, volunteers and interns that support the gallery staff in a variety of gallery operations.

Director and Chief Curator

Provides leadership and guidance for gallery staff, guides gallery strategy and manages the gallery budget (including sponsorship and fundraising). Provides curatorial oversight for exhibitions and plans the annual exhibition program.

Exhibitions Coordinator

Assists the Director to coordinate gallery programming. Manages logistics (including freight and insurance) and works with the installation manager to coordinate exhibitions. Liaises with artists to ensure that works are realised according to their vision in the exhibition context.

Collections Coordinator

Looks after the university's art collection and acquires new work for the collection. Manages displays and distribution of art across the university. Manages access to the collection through exhibitions, research and online.

Communications and Outreach Advisor

Plans how the public and the university community can engage with the gallery and the RMIT Art Collection. They coordinate the gallery's publicity, managing public programming, social media and education tours.

Operations Coordinator

Deals with the day to day management of the gallery and budget, supporting all staff to ensure exhibitions run smoothly. Manages front of house operations and coordinates volunteers and casual staff.

Exhibitions Installation Coordinator

Responsible for the design and installation of exhibitions. Ensures artworks are installed safely and securely.

"Curating is 20% flair and imagination and 80% administration, collaboration and management. You need to be able to think ahead and see around corners. You cannot make a successful exhibition without the 20% but you can ruin a great idea if you cannot bring an exhibition together." Nicholas Serota, Director, Tate London (Adrian George, The Curator's Handbook, 2015)

Kawita Vatanajyankur

Squeezers, 2015

2 Channels, HD Video Still, 2015

Duration 2.36 mins loop

Purchased through the RMIT Art Fund, 2016

RMIT University Art Collection

Analysis

Squeezers is a video work that uses everyday items to make a statement on labour and the role of women in society. Vatanajyankur's work is as playful as it is meditative, and her use of colour is reminiscent of supermarket packaging and pop art. In this video, Vatanajyankur's body is transformed into a juice squeezer. Her work explores the thresholds between political and personal, work and slavery, commentary and theatrics.

Context

Kawita Vatanajyankur has exhibited in Saatchi Gallery, London's exhibition Thailand Eye, the 2017 Asia-Pacific Triennial of Performing Arts, Islands in the Stream, an exhibition presented alongside the 57th Venice Biennale and Negotiating the Future an exhibition at the Asian Art Biennial Taiwan. Vatanajyankur graduated from RMIT in 2011 after specialising in painting – the influence of her painting past can be seen in the minimal use of movement in her video work and use of colour.



Still image courtesy of the artist

Curatorial Framework

Squeezers is exhibited alongside works in the collection that examine the self. This work explores the limitations and thresholds of our bodies through using endurance. It comments on the physical labour behind commercially available products, and the difference between machines and people.

Kawita Vatanajyankur on labour:

"I believe that in today's world, where we are governed by money and money is a tool for our survival, we ourselves are slowly becoming a tool to gain money. Because of this, we are working continuously everyday like machines while in this technological world, the machines are replacing our jobs."

My work parodies a slippage between human and machines."

Question for students: Vatanajyankur trains for months so that she can choreograph and endure her performances – in one performance she fell on her head from very high up, causing an injury that gave her chronic vertigo. Are there any disciplines you could include in your artistic process? What are the risks associated with your practice and how can you alter your practice to minimise those risks?

Question for students: What visual language prompts audiences to consider feminist issues while viewing Vatanajyankur's work?

Robert Jacks

Grey Cut Paper 45°-90°, 1969/2012

Acrylic paint on arches paper

182 x 115 cm

Purchased through the RMIT Art Fund, 2016
RMIT University Art Collection

Analysis

Grey Cut Paper 45°-90° is a serialist work that follows cuts in paper progressively through a strict series of angles. Twelve permutations of the angle trace the transformation of a triangle into a square, while shadows cast by the paper as it peels away remind us of Jacks' interest in sculptural form. The concept of progressive angles has been a preoccupation of Jacks since the late 1960s and can be found throughout his oeuvre in a variety of mediums. His book *An Unfinished Work*, outlines the precise process for creating sculptural works of this nature, with the potential for unlimited copies.

Context

Born in Melbourne, Robert Jacks (1943-2014), studied sculpture at Prahran Technical College and painting at RMIT University. A discussion of his career would be incomplete without mentioning the NGV's seminal 1968 exhibition *The Field*. This exhibition, held just two years after Jacks' well received first solo exhibition, launched the careers of many

young artists and forged a new direction for Australian abstract art.

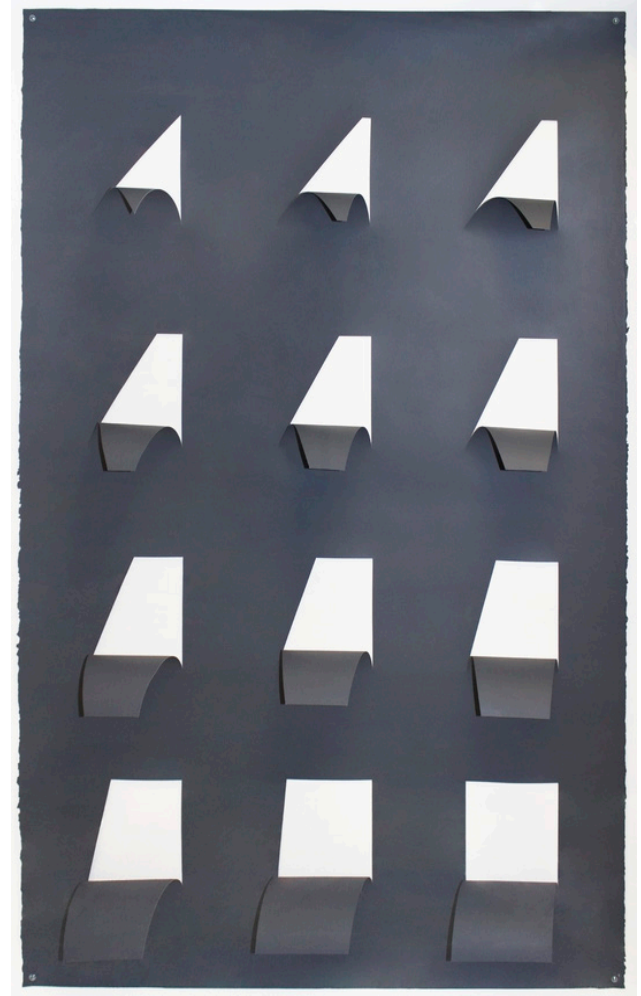
Jacks was based in Canada and the USA for the next decade, and in 1976 he established the Greene Street Studio – in a move largely recognised as the beginning of the Australia Council's current model for overseas artist residencies. During this period, Jacks style matured and his work was increasingly engaged with minimalism and conceptual practices.

In 1978, after two years in Texas, Jacks returned to Australia to be artist-in-residence at the University of Melbourne. In the 1990s Jacks moved to rural Victoria with his wife, and in 2001 he established the Robert Jacks Drawing Prize at Bendigo Art Gallery. In 2006 he was awarded an Order of Australia for his contribution to Australian art.

Curatorial Framework

Grey Cut Paper 45°-90° has been exhibited alongside works in the exhibition that emphasise form.

Question for students: *Grey Cut Paper 45°-90°* is made using a set of instructions or rules. What kind of disciplines do you use in your practice and do they define your visual language?



RMIT University Art Collection



RMIT University Art Collection

Rupert Bunny

The Shelter [I], c. 1913-21

The Shelter [I], c. 1913-21

Oil paint on canvas

180 x 210 cm

Gift of the Rupert Bunny Estate, 1949

RMIT University Art Collection

Analysis

“When it was donated to the Melbourne Technical College (as RMIT was then known), this work was catalogued as *The Bathers*, which appears to have been a descriptor rather than the actual title. Stylistically, the work matches the seaside tableaux Bunny was painting between 1913 and 1921, and is almost

identical to a work in the National Gallery of Victoria collection, entitled *Spring Scene* (c. 1921). However, the NGV painting had been displayed during Bunny’s lifetime in a solo exhibition at the Athenaeum Gallery as *L’Abri* (in English, *The Shelter*). Though both are highly finished, the NGV version is signed, unlike RMIT’s, suggesting that the latter is likely a study or the first attempt at a theme. RMIT’s version has therefore been re-catalogued as *The Shelter [I]*, the numeral differentiating it from the later piece.”

Context

“An acclaimed artist even in his own lifetime, Rupert Bunny was amongst the first Australian artists to study at the National Gallery

School in Melbourne. Whilst contemporaries, including Heidelberg School artists Arthur Streeton and Frederick McCubbin, were more interested in adapting impressionistic techniques to the Australian light and landscape, Bunny was fascinated with earlier European art, particularly that of the French Salon. He travelled to Europe in 1884, and remained there for several decades, making Paris his home. Inspired by Parisian life, he painted idyllic scenes of the Belle Époque, full of ease and charm, as well as lavish and exotic mythological themes.”

Harriet Edquist & Elizabeth Grierson, *A Skilled Hand and Cultivated Mind*, 2nd ed., 2012

Curatorial Framework

The Shelter [I] has been exhibited alongside works in the collection that examine the self. In this work, Bunny has captured a small group of female bathers in a leisurely moment.

Question for students: What elements of visual language in *The Shelter [I]* show the influence of early 20th Century European art trends on Bunny’s art practice? What are the main influences on your art practice?

Question for students: This work was created during World War I, why do you think Bunny was painting subject matter of this nature during such a violent period?

Michael Cook

Mother – Rocking Horse, 2016

Inkjet print on cotton rag

120 x 180 cm (image)

Purchased through the RMIT Art Fund, 2016

RMIT University Art Collection

Analysis

In this series of photographs, the Australian landscape is completely deserted apart from a mother and the artefacts of her absent child. The figure and her surrounding objects are captured in full colour in contrast to the muted landscape around them. The influence of Michael Cook's background in fashion photography is perceptible in his use of photographic layers to perfectly execute a concept.

Context

Michael Cook is an Indigenous artist of Bidjara heritage. His work is represented in many of Australia's major collecting institutions including the National Gallery of Australia, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the National Gallery of Victoria and Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art. Cook had a solo exhibition at the 2016 Art Basel Hong Kong and his work has been curated in many noteworthy exhibitions including *Colony: Frontier Wars* at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2018, *Indigenous Australia: enduring civilisation* at the British Museum and *Personal Structures* at Palazzo Mora during the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015.



Image courtesy of the artist and THIS IS NO FANTASY

The atmosphere of loss in this series of photographs talks directly to all mothers who have been separated from their children. In the context of his other works, which are highly critical of colonisation in Australia, the series can be interpreted as referencing the Stolen Generation and the ongoing impact the Australian government has had on individuals and families through the forcible removal of children. It is also a deeply personal work, as Michael Cook was adopted and only met his birth mother in his thirties.

Curatorial Framework

This part of the exhibition emphasises the

self. In *Mother*, Cook examines the tension between historical and contemporary understandings of identity. To hear Cook talk about using art to learn about Indigenous histories and connect to his identity watch this video: <http://www.magnt.net.au/michaelcook>.

Question for students: How does your personal experience reflect global or national issues, do you have a unique perspective that could be communicated through art?

Question for students: How has Cook implied the presence of a child without including one in the photograph?

Penny Byrne

Silent Testimony (PTSD), 2015

Earthenware and mixed media

65 x 52.5 x 27 cm

Purchased through the RMIT Art Fund, 2016

RMIT University Art Collection

Analysis

In this mixed media work Byrne has used conservation techniques and found objects to alter the meaning of an earthenware statue. *Silent Testimony (PTSD)* provokes the viewer to contemplate the physical and psychological impacts of war, and consider how traumatic experiences manifest in people in ways both visible and invisible.

Context

Penny Byrne graduated from RMIT University in 1987 with a Bachelor of Arts (BA Fine Arts Ceramics). She went on to study a Graduate Diploma in Ceramics and Glass Conservation and Restoration in the United Kingdom and later studied law. Byrne has exhibited extensively in Australia, Asia and Europe and her work is featured in the collections of many major institutions including the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Artbank and the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery. In 2015 she exhibited *Hurt Locker*, a glass suit of armour in the exhibition *GLASSTRESS Gotiker* at the 56th Venice Biennale.



© Penny Byrne

Penny Byrne on her education at RMIT:

“Back then it was a very technical course, and particularly in my first year, I had an amazing lecturer called Jeff Wilkinson. He was head of ceramics, he was real old school potter, and the great thing about him was that he taught us technique. And that has set me up for everything that I’ve done. Even being a ceramics conservator and specializing in ceramics, you’ve got to know about how ceramics are made to then be able to conserve it or restore it properly.”

Curatorial Framework

This work has been exhibited alongside works that emphasise protest. These works use visual language to provoke a response in the viewer and make a statement about the artists’ personal and political values.

Question for students: Do you have any particular area of interest or knowledge that could be incorporated in your artistic process?

Question for students: What symbols has Byrne employed to convey meaning in *Silent Testimony (PTSD)*?



© Chris Watson

Chris Watson

Namib, 2012-13

Sound installation

16 channels, duration 14 mins 15 secs

Commissioned through the RMIT Art Fund, 2012

RMIT University Art Collection

Sonic Arts Collection

Analysis

“The Namib Desert is an ancient and unique landscape: a vast, mobile sea of sand that extends over 2,000km down from the Atlantic coast of south and west Africa. *Namib* is composed from recordings made over 8 years in different regions of the desert, from the Skeleton Coast to the interior dune mountains. It traces the shifting sounds created by the dense Atlantic fog bank rolling inland at dawn to transform the acoustics along the

dry banks of the Kuiseb River. It uncovers the deep rhythms of an evolving sand dune, from the movement of individual grains to the slow westwards creep of an entire mountain of sand. And it reveals the sounds of the dunes, hills and valleys being patrolled after sunset by an emerging alien empire - insects vibrating and singing into the night air. *Namib* reflects a timescale beyond our reckoning, compressing an environment that has slowly evolved over 50 million years into a 14 minute soundscape.”

Context

Chris Watson is a freelance sound designer interested in “putting a microphone where you can’t put your ears”. He has recorded wildlife and natural phenomena around the world,

from crocodiles to penguins, from deserts to icebergs and everything in between. Watson started his career in sound in 1971 as a founding member of the experimental group Cabaret Voltaire but he didn’t start recording until the early 1980’s when he joined Tyne Tees Television. Watson has recorded for many popular documentaries, winning two BAFTA awards for Best Factual Sound, the first in 1996 for his work on David Attenborough’s *Birds* and again in 2012 for his work on the BBC series *Frozen Planet*.

Curatorial Framework

Namib has been exhibited alongside works that emphasise place. *Namib* is a 16 channel sound scape, that sounds best when it is played over lots of speakers. Watson has decided which sounds to put in each channel, but a sound engineer is required to mix the work for the speakers available in the gallery space using a process called sound diffusion. The gallery has tried to make the sound installation interesting for the audience by installing something to look at while they listen.

Question for Students: How has Watson used sound to situate the audience in a desert landscape? What sounds are familiar? Are there any sounds that you don’t recognise?

Question for Students: What are the different ways you can listen to sound art? How do different galleries present sound art and who in the gallery makes these decisions?

Chaos & Order is a collaboration between RMIT Gallery and the RMIT School of Art MA Arts Management program.

Curator: Jon Buckingham

Curatorial assistants [RMIT MA Arts Management]:

Ellie Collins, Adelaide Gandrille, Marybel Schwartz, Valerie Sim, Sophie Weston

Artists including: Tate Adams, Howard Arkley, Khadim Ali, Peter Booth, Polly Borland, Godwin Bradbeer, Rupert Bunny, Penny Byrne, Maria Fernanda Cardoso, Peter Clarke, Michael Cook, Len Crawford, Daniel Crooks, Craig Easton, Peter Ellis, Neil Emmerson, Juan Ford, Hayden Fowler, Len French, Sally Gabori, Bill Henson, Petr Her-el, Clare Humphries, Robert Hunter, Robert Jacks, Sam Jinks, George Johnson, Roger Kemp, Inge King, Grahame King, Juz Kitson, Grace Lillian Lee, Helen Maudsley, Nick Mourtzakis, Trevor Nickolls, Jill Orr, Polixeni Papapetrou, Susan Philipsz, Anthony Pryor, Reko Rennie, Yhonnie Scarce, Greg Semu, Jan Senbergs, Christian Thompson, Kawita Vatanajyankur, Ah Xian.

