## UNIT 7 – Cultural Intersections

### Overview

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit of work</th>
<th>Cultural Intersections</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
<td>One term</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stage</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Year</strong></td>
<td>Year 9 or 10</td>
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**Unit description**

This unit of work provides learning opportunities for students to make a series of photographs influenced by the artistic practice of the Aboriginal photographer and film producer Michael Riley.

In critical and historical studies students use the cultural frame to investigate the historical aspects of life for Aboriginal people on missions, which is the subject matter of Riley’s work. They then employ a subjective point of view to find and explore an empathetic response from their own experience. In artmaking students reflect on aspects of their own life and culture that can be represented as metaphors and symbols in their photographs. Darkroom photographic practices and/or digital media are used to communicate these experiences of their world to an audience.

**Forms**

- 2D – photography, digital media, computer-generated and computer-enhanced graphics

**Frames**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual framework</th>
<th>Subjective</th>
<th>Structural</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
<th>Postmodern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Art</strong></td>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Artwork</td>
<td>World</td>
<td>Audience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key artists**

- Michael Riley (Wiradjuri language group), Three Images (*Untitled*) from the *Sacrifice* series
- Rea (Kamilaroi/Wailan language groups)
- Darren Siwes (of Ngalkban and Dutch heritage)
- Brenda L Croft (Gurindji language group), *Jesus wants me for a sunbeam*, 1998. From the series ‘Alt(a)red Angels’, digital image
- Brook Andrew (Wiradjuri language group), *Sexy and dangerous*, 1998, digital image

**Outcomes**

- 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10
### Specific content focus for Unit 7.

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<tr>
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focus on issues of significance to their school and culture to generate ideas for artmaking and the conceptual interest of works for example: peer pressure, gender, politics, global warming, human rights, genetic engineering, the environment |
| | belief, value and meaning in artmaking in the **structural** frame | employ a range of conventions including codes, symbols and signs  
consider how communication is embedded in the material and conceptual organisation |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts of art as a system of symbolic communication through which particular forms of aesthetic information are transmitted</th>
<th>Critical and historical studies</th>
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<td>of their own artworks, eg the choice of paint and placement of an image relative to others in the composition</td>
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Teaching and learning activities

1. Critical and historical studies

Ways to interpret Michael Riley’s photographs

Students examine images of artworks by Michael Riley and consider the following questions with a focus on the structural frame:

- How has the artist used light and contrast to highlight the tonal and textural properties of objects in the photographs?
- How has this use of light and contrast contributed to the meaning of the photographs? Refer to particular examples of his work.
- Identify and describe some of the other photographic techniques Riley has used in his work. Consider techniques such as cropping, close-up views, framing, focus and sepia applications etc, used to enhance the meaning of the works.
- How do these particular visual qualities in Michael Riley’s photographs contribute to the way audiences read meaning in these works?
- Explain how examples of Michael Riley’s photography can be interpreted as challenges or reflections of issues in today’s society.

Michael Riley’s practice – issues and concepts

Students use the cultural frame to position an exploration of the historical and Christian concepts in Michael Riley’s photography by viewing his photographic series ‘Sacrifice’, (Three images (untitled) from the Sacrifice series) and read the text provided. As a class they discuss the following points:

- Audience interpretations of the term ‘sacrifice’ and how Riley has represented this concept in his artworks, based on his experiences of his world.
- Riley declares that these are part of his ‘first conceptual work’. Consider what the term ‘conceptual’ means.
- How do the images in the these photographs reflect attitudes and beliefs about Christianity and mission life?
- How do they reflect political policies, historical events and the relationships to Aboriginal Culture? For example the row of eight fish represent Christian parables. From Riley’s perspective, how do they symbolise mission life (the imposition of order, rationing, house inspections etc)?
- Riley’s previous works were usually portraits. In this series he talks about ‘replacing images of people with interspersed and symbolically loaded images’. Find an example of Riley’s early work and compare this with work in this unit.
- ‘Michael’s work constantly shifts between the literal and the allegorical.’ Briefly discuss in writing what this statement means and consider the qualities of selected examples to support your view.

2. Artmaking

The concept of ‘sacrifice’ as subject matter

Using the knowledge they have built through previous cultural frame investigations, students consider how they can represent ideas about loss of identity, cultural intersection or the
cultural sacrifice that takes place through the processes of colonisation, migration and cultural displacement. They make a series of four to six photographic or digital prints by focusing on objects as cultural symbols and metaphors. Conceptual practice is developed through an understanding of the role of signs, codes and symbols in artworks. Students acknowledge the role of intention in their practice as a device that is used to position audiences for multilayered readings of artworks. Associated concepts, such as dispossession, displacement, separation, alienation and the possible future of reconciliation are considered. Students investigate how they could apply these ideas to aspects of their own social context or society in general.

Ideas about the relationship between artworks and the world (the student’s personal world or the external world) may be extended and developed by considering the following:

- What does ‘sacrifice’ mean in this society, time and context?
- Identify some sacrifices students have made in relation to personal compromises made, cultural traditions sacrificed in relation to their own family situations, self-sacrifice, religious sacrifice etc.
- Consider an aspect of school life that has affected you.
- Identify and consider some social or school issues that are significant to you and your family (eg rules, routines, expectations of others, religious ideals, traditions).
- Consider times when you have been marginalised by others.

Using their Visual Arts diary, students document the concepts that are of interest to them and consider different kinds of objects that could take on a symbolic and metaphorical meaning to represent their ideas.

**Developing imagery and darkroom techniques**

Having made a decision about the objects to be selected, and acknowledging the ways these images will signify meaning in their work, students develop a series of small sketches illustrating how they plan to situate the object and take the photographs with a view to creating subtle, multilayered and compelling images. These decisions are made in conjunction with a demonstration of techniques that can be used to achieve particular effects in photography and/or digital imaging.

The teacher demonstrates how to achieve the following effects either in the darkroom or using appropriate digital equipment and software:

- controlled lighting effects (natural and studio lighting)
- accentuating tone and texture (sepia toning, using filters, image adjustments in hue, saturation, brightness and contrast)
- changing backgrounds (natural and made environments, sterile and opulent, scanning and layering)
- various viewpoints, selection, framing and cropping
- contrast (tonal dropout, solarisation, posterisation)

Students then review their ideas, set up their objects and equipment, take the photographs, digitally manipulate them (if working in a digital form) and print them.
Evaluation of student images

Students work in small groups to plan the exhibition of their photographs and are asked to make decisions about which images to include in the final series of works. As a group they consider and discuss:

- how their conceptual practice is best represented in particular images
- the extent to which images represent the original concept developed and connect to others within the series
- ways in which their understanding of the technical aspects of photography or digital imaging techniques are best demonstrated by particular photographs
- ways in which their series of works relate to the images of Michael Riley
- how the role of selection within a series or body of work contributes in a strong and convincing way to the way artists position an audience to read an artwork.

Students note decisions, considerations and aspects of this discussion in their Visual Arts diary.

With reference to their lead-up work and changes in direction students select their best four to six images for final submission and exhibition. Students record their artmaking intentions in an artist’s statement that may accompany their work at exhibition.

3. Critical and historical studies

Understanding of the significance of mission life for artists

Students view other artworks by artists dealing with representations of mission life. Consider artworks by Elaine Russell (*Inspection Day*, 1994, acrylic on cardboard), Ian Abdulla (*On the Mission*), Brenda L Croft (*Alt(a)red Angels series*) and Brook Andrew (*Sexy and dangerous*). The structural and cultural frames are used to position a comparative analysis of the conceptual practice of each artist through an explanation of the use of signs and symbols in each work. The investigation of these artworks could consider:

- cultural, social, political and religious influences upon the work of artists
- the use of particular techniques and methods and the material aspects of the artworks
- ways we can explain the significance of these and similar artworks in this time and place compared with how they might have been understood when they were originally made.

4. Evidence of learning

Written responses and class discussions demonstrate students’ understanding of the cultural and structural frames and conceptual framework relationships and an understanding and knowledge of critical and historical writing as a means of informing an audience about an artist’s practice. Participation in discussion and written work demonstrates an ability to construct cultural explanations of personal experiences of the world through the interpretation of artworks.

Visual Arts diary entries demonstrate understanding of planning, design and the conventions of photographic and digital practices. Experiments with techniques demonstrate students’
skills in selecting and using a range of photographic techniques. Experiments, drawings and photographs demonstrate students’ understanding of the symbolic use of materials and subject matter to represent aspects of the world.

5. Feedback

- Teacher observation and oral feedback during the discussion, planning and making of photographic and/or digital works.
- Oral feedback during discussion about artists and their practice.
- Written feedback in the Visual Arts diary about artmaking experiments and critical and historical studies activities and interpretations and explanations of artworks.

6. Related activities

The subject matter of Riley’s photographs reflects the church’s role in mission life. A study of these issues will give students a better understanding of Riley’s work and Aboriginal art in general. Students can research the establishment and impact of missions in or near their school community considering such things as:
  - living conditions
  - experiences as retold by Aboriginal people, including negative and positive experiences
  - aspects of mission life
  - consequences of mission life on contemporary Aboriginal culture.

Students can discuss:
  - what is meant by the term ‘Aboriginal mission life’
  - ways in which Christianity has affected Aboriginal culture and belief systems.

Click here to go to the Resources and Research.
# UNIT 8 – Place, Possession and Dispossession

## Overview

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<th>Unit of work</th>
<th>Place, Possession and Dispossession</th>
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<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
<td>One to two terms</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stage</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Year</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Unit description</strong></td>
<td>In this unit students use the postmodern frame to study different cultural beliefs and attitudes represented in traditions of Australian landscape painting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practice, artmaking and critical and historical studies</strong></td>
<td>In artmaking students develop a collage, photomontage or digital image in which historical images, artworks and traditional painting techniques are recontextualised to represent the different histories of a community or place. They work both individually and collaboratively to select and represent ironic and paradoxical aspects of the social history in Australian and regional contexts in collages and paintings. In critical and historical studies students gain experience and strategies in reading the layers of revealed and suppressed significance in images. Through an investigation of Lin Onus’s artistic practice the dominant view of culture is challenged and questioned. Issues of identity, ownership, dispossession and social justice are investigated and inform artmaking activities. The complexity of this unit makes it suitable for Year 10 students. The unit could be adapted for Year 9 use by a more simple focus on the work of Onus in studying, and on a collaborative collage in artmaking to which each student makes a contribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Forms</strong></td>
<td>2D, digital imaging, collage, photomontage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frames</strong></td>
<td>Subjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conceptual framework</strong></td>
<td>Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key artists</strong></td>
<td>Lin Onus (Yorta Yorta language group). Other works by the artist include <em>And on the Eighth Day</em> 1992, <em>Michael and I are just slipping down to the pub for a minute</em> 1992, <em>Fruit Bats</em> 1990, <em>Gordon Bennett</em></td>
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  - artists from different cultures  
  - Aboriginal and Indigenous artists  
  - female and male artists  
  - those who use conventional and/or more contemporary technologies | • explain how artists interpret the world in making artworks and how they seek to represent concepts through a range of styles and approaches |
| • how the world can be interpreted in art and the ways in which ideas are represented | • interpret and explain relationships between artists – artworks – the world – audiences |
| • how the frames offer alternative ways to think about relationships between the artist – artwork – world – audience | • interpret and explain relationships between artists – artworks – the world – audiences |
| belief, value and meaning from the **cultural** frame | explain how critical and historical accounts provide a way to understand social conditions, perspectives and the social construction of meaning |
| concepts of art as the aesthetic building and defining of social identity | consider how critical and historical accounts provide a way to understand how art can represent issues related to class, gender, ethnicity, politics, science, globalisation, technology, economics and the environment |
| **postmodern** frame | identify how artworks may be explained and interpreted as intertextual, including those that make use of time-based and digital technologies, and pose a challenge to more conventional and established conceptions of art as precious, unique and singular |
| concepts of art as intertextual and as a way of recontextualising other art | explain how critical and historical accounts critique power in art seeking to uncover patterns of authority and the dominance of particular narratives of art |
|  | identify and account for postmodern orientations to art |
Teaching and learning activities

1. Critical and historical studies

Landscape paintings as representations of cultural beliefs and attitudes

A study of images of the Australian landscape when viewed from the cultural frame deals with issues of the traditional construction of cultural identity and heritage.

Students research the significance of landscape paintings by western and Aboriginal artists and consider how, over time, artworks have represented different cultural beliefs and values about the land and its people. The purpose of the study is for students to develop an understanding of the context and art history referenced by Onus in his artistic practice.

A statement by Daniel Thomas provides a cultural point of view that is adopted by the teacher and students during their investigation of selected artworks. Thomas explains that ‘art … is the principal means by which “Australia” has been invented and created.’

This idea was behind the landmark exhibition *Creating Australia* held in 1988. As part of the Bicentennial celebrations this survey exhibition acknowledged the range of ways artists practising in historical, modernist and contemporary contexts had variously shaped and contributed to or defined the Australian cultural identity through their artworks.

The teacher presents an overview of Australian landscape painting (19th and 20th century examples) that explores and assists an understanding of the cultural frame. The account focuses on ways artworks have contributed to and confirmed attitudes and perceptions of Australia. Different points of view used by artists working in colonial times, modernist styles, Aboriginal cultures, and contemporary contexts are explained and compared (see list below). Consideration is also given to how artworks represent shared cultural beliefs that change over time due to political, social and economic influences. Concepts such nationalism, cultural identity, reconciliation, ownership and tradition are discussed.

Discussion could focus on Glover’s approach to representing the landscape as an artist from England with some academic training and classical beliefs about landscape painting. This approach could be compared with works by Heidelberg School artists, Gascoigne, and traditional and contemporary Aboriginal artists. Consideration is given to the different ways, both materially and conceptually, that artists have dealt with the idea of landscape over time and how this has changed and has shaped attitudes about Australia. An exploration of the relationship between artists and their world considers the changes to the representation of the landscape over time, which mirror changes in Australian history and reflect the construct of our national identity according to the particulars of time and place in that history.
Research assignment

Students select and research one example from each of the following groups of artworks.

**Group: 1 Nineteenth-century artworks**
- Augustus Earle, *A Bivouac of Travellers in a Cabbage-Tree Forest*, c.1838
- Eugene Von Guerard, *Stony Rises, Corangamite*, 1857
- William Barrak, *Dancing Scenes*, c.1880

**Group: 2 Twentieth-century artworks**
- Albert Namatjira, *Ghost Gum*, c.1950
- Russell Drysdale, *Ceremony at the Rockface*, 1963
- Fred Williams, *Upwey Landscape II*, 1965
- Emily Kame Kngwarreye, *Untitled (Alhalkere)*, 1990, acrylic on linen
- Rover Thomas, *Dreamtime Story of the Creation of the Erskine Range*, acrylic on canvas

Students find and read at least two articles or accounts by different art historians or critics about each example they have chosen to research. To assist students to understand the ways in which artworks can be viewed from the cultural frame they consider the following questions to structure their investigation:

- When was the artwork made?
- Describe the society the artist lived in at this time.
- At the time the artist was working, what was the significance of the land to communities in Australia?
- How are particular cultural attitudes to the land reflected in the artwork?
- How does the artwork deal with ideas of ownership and dispossession?
- How has the artist used images of the land and Australia to represent particular cultural ideas and traditions?
- How do other examples of the artist’s work reflect similar ideas about the significance of the land?

Based on their research a written account is developed in the form of an essay. Students are asked to respond to the following: ‘Explain how two artists and their works have contributed to the invention and creation of an Australian identity’.

2. Artmaking

**Interrogating a place and uncovering its histories**

To develop the conceptual basis for this artmaking unit the teacher and students conduct a genealogical investigation of the locality or community they live in. Using a timeline to collaboratively record the different histories of their families, Aboriginal culture and European presence in the local area, students begin documenting aspects of the community in the present. They then take on the role of an ethnographer or anthropologist and research
aspects of the past history of the place and uncover events and traditions that have particular significance for a range of cultural groups.

For example, evidence of different histories and ‘voices’ that have shaped the community in which students live have been documented through things such as place names, customs, celebrations, events, and stories. An Aboriginal community member or a representative of a local historical society or cultural group could be invited to speak to the class or conduct a workshop with students about regional and local interests, their experiences and history. Procedures and protocols for school visits are explained in part 3 of *Working with Aboriginal Communities: A Guide to Community Consultation and Protocols* (Board of Studies NSW, 2001).

The class collaboratively develops an archive of evidence to support the events recorded on the developing timeline. This evidence represents the historical world based on investigations of individual family histories, Aboriginal history and European history in the area. Evidence collected and documented in the diary could include:

- Documentation and research of places with Aboriginal names and/or western names (see the box below for further information).
- Information about the meaning and origins of the names of places and significant landmarks in the area.
- Information about language groups, families of the area and their ancestral origins.
- Images of the sites, landmarks and characteristics of the place such as photographs, postcards, historical images from books, maps, architectural plans and Aboriginal and western artists’ drawings and paintings of the place from past and present contexts.
- Copies of documents such as land titles, newspaper clippings and articles, business receipts, clothing and other artefacts and objects associated with historical stories.
- Interviews and stories from relatives, ‘old-timers’ and local history experts.
- Physical evidence relating to the place or community, objects that are identified with activities and industries in the local area, feelings about the place, the goals and dreams of Aboriginals, explorers, early settlers and present inhabitants, how the place or community has changed over time, and particular people who have significantly contributed to the area over time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Think about the original meanings of place names in Australia.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do the place names describe places in Australia or other places (eg Eden and Newcastle)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the place names reflect the explorers’ expectations and disappointments (eg Mount Misery and Mount Disappointment)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were the explorers trying to position themselves in a foreign landscape, to locate a ‘here’ (the travellers’ viewpoint and orientation) and a ‘there’ (the landscape, the horizon), ‘to name in order to travel’ so that they could ‘possess’ and return?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do the place names tell us about the understanding and knowledge of Australia during the colonial period?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are Australian place names always appropriate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do they reflect a shared history and different cultural experiences in Australia? (concepts and quotes from Paul Carter, <em>Naming Place</em>, and Bill Ashcroft (ed), <em>The Post-Colonial Reader</em>).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Critical and historical studies

Questioning the meaning of cultural images and symbols

Using their understanding of the postmodern frame, students speculate about ways the meanings of images can be double-coded and can convey different meanings that reference other historical images and ideas. Concepts such as quotation, recontextualisation, borrowing and ‘appropriation’ are introduced as aspects of artistic practice.

The teacher and class interrogate examples of artworks that have borrowed and recontextualised images from other sources. Students develop an understanding of how to:

- trace the images the artist has used back to historical sources
- investigate the meaning of images in the context of the original artwork
- compare these interpretations with the meaning of the revision of original artworks.

The idea of attributing new meanings to images and symbols by quoting them and placing them in new contexts, or artworks, is the focus of this investigation. Appropriations of works such as Manet’s *Olympia*, Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* and Duchamp’s *L.H.O.O.Q* and other works used to advertise products in contemporary society are ideal examples to illustrate concepts characterising a postmodern point of view.

Students then ‘play detective’ using the investigative strategies discovered above to decode and trace the origins of the ideas represented in the artwork *And on the Eighth Day* by Lin Onus. Working in small groups students:

- identify and list the images and symbols Lin Onus has appropriated and recontextualised in the work (eg bible, sky, angel, gun, wire, light shaft, concentric circles, land, lamb, colours)
- speculate about and note the possible meanings of these images in terms of western cultural history
- speculate about and note the possible meanings of these images in terms of Aboriginal cultural history
- identify images that are situated in novel and contradictory combinations. Which images are not normally associated with others? Does the meaning of images change when placed in the new context of Lin Onus’s work?
- identify the way different audiences will encode a sign or symbol with meaning contingent upon a culturally contextualised reading of that symbol or sign.

By considering the way the postmodern frame generates meaning, the class, in a discussion, speculates about possible interpretations that can now be made of the meaning of the artwork. This could include the ways artworks are interpreted as representations of ideas concerning dispossession, alienation and identity, and are offered in the form of evaluative judgements supported by evidence from the artworks. Students record these interpretations.
4.  Artmaking

Ideas for artworks: marginalised stories

Students continue to assume the role of detective, ethnographer and anthropologist and investigate the archive of evidence collected. They survey what has been collected and establish an inventory of what can be known about the place or community. By considering the way the postmodern frame generates meaning they are then challenged to respond to the following critical questions:

- What are the ideas, issues and stories that have not been included in mainstream accounts about the community or place?
- Are there stories that relate to their place or community that have been overlooked, misrepresented, not been told before, or forgotten?
- Where do the dominant stories and accounts of history come from? What are the political agendas that motivate people or groups in the community to sustain this view of history?

The concepts of marginalisation, racism, social injustice, inequality, dispossession, and alienation addressed in *And on the Eighth Day* are revisited and explained in terms of evidence in the archive. A review of examples of other works by Lin Onus could also assist in the clarification of issues and ideas worthy of investigation for artmaking.

Having researched their local historical world students select an issue relating to a marginalised or dispossessed sector of the community. Possible ideas could include:

- a story collected that is about the achievements of Aboriginal people in the area
- achievements of women who have silently contributed to community projects or family life
- the significant contribution of migrant workers to the local industry and the hardships they experienced.

The teacher would need to give sensitive consideration to ways the discussion of these issues is regulated and expressed in a constructive and inclusive manner by students. In the diary, students document one idea for a collage, photomontage or digital image and select key items, images and text collected that will clearly represent their ideas.

5.  Critical and historical studies

Revealing Lin Onus’s history and heritage

The focus of this study is on Lin Onus as an artist who, through his artmaking practice, was able to make significant contributions within and between Aboriginal and western cultural communities in Australia.

Students research the history of Lin Onus’s practice. They:

- read the information on Lin Onus in *Gallery and Artists* and highlight key words in the text
- refer to newspaper and journal articles, including tributes written about the artist after his death in 1996, that provide concise and accessible accounts of his history and achievements.
The following questions guide the collection of information using the subjective frame to focus on how the artist’s own history is represented in his works.

What is Lin Onus’s Aboriginal cultural heritage?
- Explain the artist’s different relationships with Aboriginal people and communities in his life in the city and Maningrida.
- How was the artist reunited with his Aboriginal heritage?
- Was he a political activist? What was his contribution to ensuring the integrity of Aboriginal cultural interests in the artworld?
- List artworks by the artist that make reference to his Aboriginal education and traditions.

What is Lin Onus’s western cultural heritage?
- Where was Lin Onus raised and educated? How has this upbringing, his family history and education influenced his artistic practice?
- How did his initial training as a mechanic influence the development of his ideas for artworks? How did he begin painting?
- Suggest reasons he adopted a photorealist or trompe l’oeil style of painting.
- Why has the artist used humorous and trivial modern objects from middle-class Australia to represent ideas?

Cross-cultural meanings in artworks

Having gathered information about Lin Onus’s history and heritage, students then consider Michael Eather’s interpretation of Lin Onus’s artistic practice. He states that Lin Onus ‘purposefully builds into each work cultural imagery from Aboriginal and white Australian visual systems, the humour and drama, to access audiences from both camps’. Examples of artworks by Lin Onus such as *And on the Eighth Day* (1992), *Michael and I are just slipping down to the pub for a minute* (1992) and *Fruit Bats* (1990) are used to illustrate how social issues and traditions can be questioned using interesting combinations of text and imagery to parody ideas in humorous, sensitive and light-hearted ways.

The class discusses Eather’s quote and range of examples of Onus’s artworks to assist in an understanding of the relationship between artworks and the world when viewed from the cultural frame. Students consider the following:
- How does Lin Onus access audiences from western and Aboriginal culture?
- How do his artworks reveal evidence of his history and heritage?
- How do artworks by Lin Onus expose different accounts of Australian history?
- Interpret the work *True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Raise the Flag*. How does this work raise awareness of political and social issues in Australia?
- Explain the ways artworks by Lin Onus reveal his search for identity.
- How do examples of his works deal with issues of dispossession and dislocation?
- Identify and interpret examples of his artworks that use irony, wit and humour to question issues of social justice and equity.
- Describe some examples of Onus’s use of juxtaposition, satire and appropriation as a tool for political comment.
- Identify and explain the resources Onus has at his disposal that enable him to access audiences from different cultural backgrounds.
Using information noted during the discussion students write an evaluation of two examples of Lin Onus’s artistic practice. Did he effectively undermine high art culture and reveal the contradictory nature of Aboriginal history and identity? Can Lin Onus be considered ‘a cultural terrorist of gentle irreverence’? (See Margo Neale, ‘A Cultural Terrorist of Gentle Irreverence’, *Artlink*, Vol 20 No 1, 2000.)

6. Artmaking

A focus at this stage should be on ways that artmaking practices can be positioned by the postmodern frame. Attention is given to the use of the juxtaposition of images and materials to create contradictory arrangements that draw attention to the idea or issue students have selected from the historical archive for investigation.

Students begin developing a collection or archive of images for a collage, photomontage or for scanning, selection and layering in preparation for a digital image.

6a Making traces of the marginalised, dispossessed and forgotten

Students select quirky, interesting and unusual objects and images from the archive and use these to generate images for the artwork. The aim is to make images that appear to have an historical presence, a simulated historical trace. Possible ideas include:

- using watercolour pastels and pencils, inks and light graphite on tracing and tissue papers or the relevant filters and effects in the layer box to achieve a faded, aged, semitransparent effect
- photocopies of images on overhead transparencies or images printed on acetate
- solarised photographs
- enlarged words and text from the archive of material
- scanned and digitally manipulated revisions of images from the archive.

6b Appropriating images and artworks

Students make links between the issue they have selected for the collage and other images and artworks from historical and contemporary contexts they have researched or found. Possible ideas could include:

- artworks by a colonial or modern artist that represent issues about ownership, possession, traditional views of society
- an advertisement from a magazine
- an historical image of the local area such as a sepia-tinted photograph
- an archival image or an old image from a newspaper clipping.

Students make copies, multiples, simulations, facsimiles, photo-releases, digitally scanned reproductions or any other visual quotations of the images selected for appropriation using technologies available to them.

Once students have generated a collection of images and reproduced appropriated images, objects and text, they begin to consider possible ways to recontextualise images in a collage, photomontage or digital image. They lay out the images and explore ways they could build a
surface of images by overlapping, connecting, layering and combining images and materials. Possible ideas include:

- reproducing, distorting and repeating images using copying technologies
- cutting up, scanning, layering, modifying and rearranging parts of images that are contradictory and incongruous
- creating visual puns, jokes, parodies and satirical images
- inverting text and images to create tensions and undermine conventional approaches to viewing the work.

This process of critique, decision-making and reflection is recorded in their Visual Arts diary, possibly with the use of digital camera. A final composition is arranged and presented for critique.

**Evaluating the meaning of the artworks**

Assisted by their understanding of the postmodern frame, students consider the following questions as they view works by their peers:

- Have the cultural histories or issues been represented with sensitivity, imagination and humour?
- How has the artist used double-coding, juxtaposition and contradictory images to reveal and question prevailing ideas and beliefs?
- Have they been successful in this investigation? Should they make any changes to the collage arrangement?

Students test their ideas by asking different audiences to evaluate their efforts and suggest interpretations of the work in progress. They note the ways the audience found the manipulation and arrangement of images humorous, witty or satirical. Adjustments are made, and the final arrangement is resolved.

**7. Artmaking – extension activity**

**A collaborative installation – representations of different voices and histories**

Students each contribute a painting to form a part of a group installation representing the voices and histories of their community or place. Students research works by Lin Onus such as *Malawan Pool* (1994) and *Barmah Forest* (1994) to assist in the selection of appropriate sections of their collages that could be developed into a painting. The intention of the painting is for students to combine and represent layers of history that have been uncovered and exposed through their previous research and investigation.

To make the painting, students select a section of their collage image and transfer this to a canvas or paper surface that has been prepared for the group painting. The image is covered with a thin layer of gesso over which students begin painting using oil or acrylic mediums. Through the completion of this painting students consolidate their understanding of the traditions and techniques of realistic painting styles. They also consider how the meaning of their own works change or may be double-coded, as they are recontextualised as part of class collaboration.

Completed works are installed in a space and exhibited with artists’ statements.
8. Evidence of learning

Written accounts, interpretations and discussions demonstrate students’ understanding of how the postmodern frame and relationships between agencies of the conceptual framework can be used to critique artworks and generate meaning. An understanding of the practice of art criticism and art history is demonstrated in research, written accounts and discussions about the significance of cultural attitudes, traditions, images and symbols in constructing and representing an Australian identity and in interpreting an artist’s practice. Visual Arts diary entries and documentation demonstrate students’ understanding of how signs and symbols can represent and convey meaning to different audiences in different times and places. Artworks demonstrate an understanding of the conventions and traditions of photographic, digital, collage and appropriation practices and the manipulation of images.

9. Feedback

- Teacher observation and oral feedback of experiments and annotations in Visual Arts diary.
- Teacher observation, discussion and feedback during making of artworks and the representation of ideas and meanings and a point of view about cultural identity and heritage.
- Oral and written feedback about investigations, research and analysis of how artists have represented cultural issues in artworks and the practice of art history and art criticism.
- Teacher feedback and discussion of artworks for exhibition and the development of artists’ statements for the audience.

10. Related activities

The local area selected by the students can reveal the history of possession and dispossession of Aboriginal people. Some students may already have knowledge of local Aboriginal history and can contribute to the lesson.

Teachers and students could research the history of the local area and its Indigenous people by gathering information about:

- their language
- their use of the land, fauna and flora
- their special and sacred sites
- their first contact with Europeans
- government policies and actions and how they have affected Aboriginal people (refer to the ‘Timeline and Associated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art’ in this resource)
- local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups that have policies on reconciliation
- the reconciliation of Aboriginal history and culture by other Australians
- Aboriginal knowledge of the country and the support given to the Europeans over the last 200 years.

Another related topic could be a study of the struggle between the English and French to map and claim Australia. Teachers could use these visual images as source material into the colonial attitudes of the Europeans in the Pacific.
Investigating and applying a cultural interpretation to artworks by Aboriginal artists

Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) was a philosopher who interpreted and explained artworks using a cultural point of view. After viewing *Angelus Novus*, a painting by the modernist artist, Paul Klee, Benjamin compared the angel in it to ‘the angel of history’ with its face turned towards the past but being irresistibly propelled into the future by a storm. The storm is blowing from Paradise and is ‘what we call progress’: see section IX at [www.leedstrinity.ac.uk/depart/media/staff/Is/WBenjamin/CONCEPT2.html](http://www.leedstrinity.ac.uk/depart/media/staff/Is/WBenjamin/CONCEPT2.html)

Students could consider how this point of view of interpretation applies to works by Lin Onus and other contemporary Aboriginal artists (eg Leah King Smith, Gordon Bennett, Tracey Moffatt, Michael Riley, Rea, Richard Bell). They could consider the following:

- Why is progress represented as a storm? Do you think contemporary Aboriginal artists would regard progress in this way? Find evidence in examples of works to support your views. (Hint: could the idea of progress as a storm be related to the rapid invasion and possession of the land by early settlers?)
- What do you think Benjamin means when he says the past could become a ‘pile of debris’? Explain how this idea could be applied to artworks by contemporary Aboriginal artists? (Hint: how might issues of over-farming, grazing and increasing problems of salinity and pollution of river systems be used as an analogy to explain this idea? Does Lin Onus address or refer to similar ideas in his work?)

Comparing postmodern and cultural points of view

Further related activities could involve researching examples of works by western, Asian and Aboriginal artists dealing with ideas and issues of history as subject matter for artworks (eg Immants Tillers, Yasumasa Morimura, Mariko Mori, Larry Rivers, Anselm Kiefer, Hans Hacke, Shirin Neshat). Students could consider:

- How do artists from different cultural contexts represent revisions of traditional histories?
- How could selected artworks be interpreted to represent and support Benjamin’s point of view?
- How might they challenge these ideas?

Click here to go to [Resources and Research](#).
Glossary

**Aboriginal**
Refers to the indigenous people of the Australian mainland including the Tiwi people of Bathurst and Melville Islands and the people of Tasmania.

**Aboriginality**
Aboriginality includes a combination of cultural heritage, spirituality and an intrinsic link with the land.

**AIATSIS**

**Aotearoa**
Maori term for New Zealand.

**assimilation**
A process involving the dispersal of families and communities and the absorption of Aboriginal people into the wider community, with the intention that they would adopt the way of life of the dominant cultural group, and Aboriginal society and culture would die out.

**ATSIC**
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission: an independent statutory authority established by the Commonwealth Government in 1990, which was responsible for Australia’s national policymaking and service delivery for Indigenous people until it was abolished in March 2005.

**business**
An Aboriginal-English term referring to ceremony and law within an Aboriginal community or language group. It is often secret/sacred. For example, an area can be off-limits for men and non-Aboriginal people if ‘women’s business’ is going on.

**country**
An area that is traditionally owned and looked after by an Aboriginal language group or community or certain people within that group. The term may indicate more than simply a geographical area; it is also a concept that can encompass the spiritual meanings and feelings of attachment associated with that area.

**cultural genocide**
The deliberate destruction of the culture of a people to remove the basis of their group identity.

**cultural heritage**
The continuity, from one generation to another, of a group’s culture, values and attitudes, including knowledge, language, arts, ritual, performances, sites and objects.

**Dreaming**
The English expression that attempts to capture the nature of traditional Aboriginal religious belief. It brings together physical sites, plants and animals etc and metaphysical concepts that are recognised as having life-sustaining power. Many ‘Dreaming tracks’ may crisscross landscape, each indicating the journey of an ancestral spirit. A people’s Dreaming is
celebrated and maintained through many expressions of movement, story and song. Individuals can have responsibilities for parts of the Dreaming in their country, such as stories, songs, ceremonies, maintenance of sacred places and paintings.

dupun A Yolngu term for the hollow log coffin.
gubba Term meaning white person. Originating in NSW, it is now used by Aboriginal people living in urban and rural areas of NSW, Queensland and Victoria.

**Indigenous people** Internationally recognised term for the first people of a land.

Koori Term used by Aboriginal people living in the south-east of Australia (NSW, Victoria and Tasmania) to describe themselves.

**Land Rights** Legal and moral acknowledgement of prior ownership of land by Australia’s Indigenous people and recognition of all the accompanying rights and obligations. For many Indigenous people, regaining the land from which they were dispossessed is integral to restoring their dignity.

**language group** Language is linked to particular geographical areas. The term ‘language group’ is used in preference to the term ‘tribe’.

Mabo Eddie Koiki Mabo, whose Murray Island land claim led the High Court to recognise, for the first time, that a form of land title existed prior to Australia’s occupation by Great Britain in 1788. The judgement, made in 1993, is usually referred to as Mabo.

Mimi Spirit figures portrayed on rock walls in western Arnhem Land. Their actions may be either malevolent or benevolent. By tradition, Mimi taught the Kunwinjku people the art of painting.

Murri Term used by Aboriginal people living in northern NSW and Queensland to describe themselves.


**Noonga, Noongar, Nyungar, Nyoongah** Terms used by Aboriginal people living in Western Australia to describe themselves.

Nunga Term used by Aboriginal people living in South Australia to describe themselves.

outstation As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people gained Land Rights and access to their ancestral homelands in the late 1970s and 1980s, they have been able to move away from government and mission centres where they were previously often forced to live. This moving back to
specific areas of country, usually in close-knit family groups, has been called the ‘outstation movement’.

**Palawa**
Aboriginal people from Tasmania.

**Papunya Tula**
An Aboriginal artists’ cooperative established in 1972 at Papunya, Northern Territory, bringing together diverse groups of Western Desert people. Often recognised by their dotting techniques, iconography, visual language, u-shapes, tracks, concentric circles etc, these artists at Papunya Tula have developed some of the most famous and distinctive works of modern Australian art.

**Rainbow Serpent**
A name that occurs through much of Aboriginal Australia for a variety of beings that take the form of a snake or sea serpent, eg Yingarna, Ngalyod, Wititj, Pulanj and Warnayarra.

**rarrk**
The fine cross-hatching used by artists of western and central Arnhem Land. Similar patterns are known as *miny ’tji* and *dhulang* in the region’s east. The patterns are used to identify clans in the region. They are understood to inscribe supernatural power in the objects on which they are painted.

**Reconciliation**

**sacred site**
A place or feature in the landscape that is sacred to a group of Aboriginal people.

**shimmer**
An effect in artwork that is achieved through the use of colour and techniques such as rarrk. It is said to evoke a spiritual ambience.

**Torres Strait Islanders**
Refers to the Indigenous people of the Torres Strait region.

**traditional**
A term often used to refer to pre-invasion Aboriginal life. This term should be used with care as some individuals or groups may find it offensive.

**Yolngu**
Term used by Aboriginal people of north-east Arnhem Land to describe themselves.

**Wandjina**
Striking figure represented by people in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, featuring a halo effect around the face. Wandjinjas are recognised as having a significant role in natural and spiritual events.