

## Body works

### Key curriculum links

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#### AusVELS The Arts

- Identify and describe key features of works of art, including the ways elements, principles and/or conventions, skills, techniques and processes are used
- Investigate and talk about the purpose of different works of art
- Discuss how observations, ideas, feelings, things imagined and purpose are conveyed in works of art
- Learn about how works of art can be designed and made to fulfil particular individual and community needs
- Talk about the way the arts connect to personal experiences and cultural and social events in the community
- Explore contemporary art forms, materials and technologies
- Analyse works of art to interpret and compare key features, symbols and cultural characteristics
- Discuss and express opinions about arts ideas
- Identify and explain personal preferences in responding to works of art
- Reflect on features in works of art and links to own art making
- Use arts language to describe, analyse and interpret the content, structure and expressive qualities of works of art
- Consider the relationship between works of art and the audience
- Explore the impact of works of art, art forms and art practices on other works of art and society in general
- Learn about the places where works of art can be found

### Overview

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The human body is a theme that can be explored in the work of many artists in *Melbourne Now*.

A number of artists create works that refer to the tradition of figurative sculpture in Western art. The figure sculptures of both Stephen Benwell and Linda Marrinon are highly individual but show an awareness of the forms and subjects of Greco-Roman statuary. Stephen Benwell's expressive ceramic figures reflect a particular interest in the depiction of the male figure. Linda Marrinon's work is informed by feminism and a keen sense of humour. Her plaster and cast figures include contemporary details and are anti-heroic and anti-monumental.

New perspectives on portraiture are offered by several artists. Georgia Metaxas presents a series of stately portraits of women who have adopted the traditional practice of wearing black, symbolising perpetual mourning, following the death of their husbands. Simon Obarzanek presents a series of video portraits in a standardised format that focus our attention on the subtleties of facial expression and movement.

The human body is used as a starting point for creative and personal explorations of form in the work of some artists. Michelle Ussher's sculpture features a porcelain biomorphic head with multiple faces, hollow eyes and swollen, protruding lips that invites various interpretations. Zoë Croggon's work is informed by her experience of studying dance and ballet. Her photographic collages are constructed from found images and show the human form in visual dialogue with images of architecture and natural sites. Douglas McManus uses laser surfacing technology, fibre optics, monofilament and malleable fluoro neon tubing and decorative forms to create a sculptural installation of a heart and lungs that is programmed to glow and move, as if breathing, in response to sound.

Artists also engage with current and sometimes sensitive issues related to the human body. Patricia Piccinini's work, a hyper-real sculpture of a bear-like figure holding an elderly woman, poses many questions about the connections between animals and humans. Both Lucy McRae and Stelarc have an interest in how science and technology might contribute to further developing the human body. Brook Andrew's installation, inspired by a rare volume of drawings of fifty-two Tasmanian Aboriginal crania, features a cabinet containing a severed human skeleton, anthropological literature and artefacts. This powerful and moving work highlights issues related to the past practice of collecting Aboriginal skeletal remains for scientific purposes.

*Melbourne Now* includes the work of a number of artists who use the human body to create performative work. Clare Rae uses photography and stop-motion animation to investigate the body and its relationship to space. She uses her own body as the subject of her art. The collaborative practice of Helen Grogan, Shelley Lasica and Anne-Marie May brings choreography and movement into the gallery context, layered with objects and sound.

*Melbourne Now* also features the work of a significant number of artists and designers whose practices are focused on adorning the human body. The creations of Maryann Talia Pau have cultural as well as aesthetic significance. Separate installations in *Melbourne Now* highlight aspects of the dynamic fashion, jewellery and shoe design culture in Melbourne. *Shoemakers* showcases the art of shoemaking through the work of six designers who combine tradition with innovation. *Designer Thinking* features the work of independent fashion labels, and *Contemporary Jewellery* showcases a variety of technical, material and conceptual approaches to making jewellery.

## Starting points for discussion

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- Based on your observations of a variety of works in *Melbourne Now*, suggest how work by contemporary artists that is related to the human body reflects contemporary concerns.
- Identify a work or project in *Melbourne Now* that uses or refers to the human form in some way. Describe how this work uses or references the human body. What ideas, meanings or feelings related to the body does this work suggest? How are these ideas or meanings suggested?
- Select a work from the jewellery, shoe or fashion design displays that interests you. Describe the work. What is it about this work that makes it interesting to you?

## Suggested artists/projects

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Some artists and projects for investigating the theme of the human body are listed below, but there are many more. You can use the *Melbourne Now* microsite or app to find more information about these artists as well as a map showing the location of their work.

### NGV International

Brook Andrew

*Contemporary Jewellery*

Helen Grogan, Shelley Lasica and Ann-Marie May

Linda Marrinon

*Shoemakers*

### The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia

Stephen Benwell

Zoë Croggon

*Designer Thinking*

Toni Maticevski

Douglas McManus

Lucy McRae

Georgia Metaxas

Simon Obarzanek

Maryann Talia Pau

Patricia Piccinini

Clare Rae

Stelarc

Michelle Ussher