

Indigenous now

Key curriculum links

Australian Curriculum cross-curriculum priority – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

- Learn about the unique belief systems of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their connection to and responsibility for Country and Place
- Examine historical perspectives from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewpoint
- Examine the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through historical, social and political lenses
- Learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples prior to colonisation by the British, the ensuing contact and its impacts
- Examine key policies and political movements over the last two centuries

VCE Sociology – Unit 3: Culture and ethnicity

Students will explore:

- a range of historical and contemporary representations of Australian Indigenous culture that could be interpreted as ethnocentric and/or culturally relativistic representations
- implications of different ways of representing Australian Indigenous culture for building awareness and perception of the culture
- the historical suppression of Australian Indigenous culture through protection, segregation, assimilation and integration policies, and Australian Indigenous responses to this suppression
- national and international factors that have supported and/or limited the increasing public awareness.

Overview

Indigenous artists currently practising in Victoria are a varied community with diverse working styles. Through their art they address the issues that affect contemporary Indigenous individuals and communities, including traditional and historical relationships to Country, responses to the injustices of the past and the preservation of identity and culture in the face of conflicting pressures.

The Indigenous artists in *Melbourne Now* celebrate connection with the visual culture and traditions of the past, while challenging contemporary audiences to consider the ongoing attempts to subjugate Indigenous people and the damage unwittingly or wilfully inflicted in the blinkered pursuit of Western values and ideals.

Lorraine Connelly-Northey re-fashions discarded industrial refuse into objects infused with cultural meaning. *An O'possum-skin cloak: Blackfella road* refers to a road near Swan Hill constructed from soil taken from sites containing middens and Aboriginal remains. *Vessels* is a collection of narbongs, or collecting bags.

In *Vox: Beyond Tasmania*, Brook Andrew creates a memorial to the genocide of the Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples and refers to the practice of removing remains for scientific study. His sculpture gives voice to those whose remains were removed from Country and whose spirits, therefore, are unable to find rest. *Vox: Beyond Tasmania* illustrates the ongoing impact of racist and ethnocentric views.

Yhonnie Scarce's *Blood on the wattle (Elliston South Australia 1849)* consists of a perspex coffin containing 400 black blown-glass yams. Like *Vox: Beyond Tasmania*, it is a chilling memorial to a massacre – one that took place in coastal South Australia.

Maree Clarke's installation *Ritual and ceremony* includes photographic images of men and women bearing the ritual markings of mourning. Clarke expresses the grief of a people for the loss of family, Country, culture and language. Bindi Cole's photographic series *A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing* asks questions about the legacy of the difficult intersection of Aboriginality with Christianity.

Placing Indigenous culture and identity within an urban environment are artists Steven Rhall and Reko Rennie. Rhall's *Kulin Project* documents the country of the Kulin Nation, covered now in roads, fences, industrial zones and construction sites. Rennie uses neon, hoarding and the material of urban industrialisation, advertising and the street to loudly proclaim an Aboriginal presence.

Starting points for discussion

Choose a work of art by an Indigenous artist.

- What ideas, beliefs and messages are evident in the work?
- How do the materials used support or add to these ideas and messages?
- Read the curator's text about the work of art. In what way does the additional information change your perception or understanding of the work?

Many works of art by Indigenous artists reference events in history. Find a work of art that comments on an event or conflict from the past.

- What are the different beliefs and expectations that underpin each side of the conflict?
- From where did these beliefs arise?
- What was the consequence of these beliefs?
- Find out more about the events referenced. What were the consequences of the historical event?

Suggested artists

Some Indigenous artists are listed below. 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. You might also like the *Indigenous Culture* tour on the *Melbourne Now* app.

NGV International

Brook Andrew
Reko Rennie

The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia

Brian Birch
Trevor Turbo Brown
Maree Clarke
Bindi Cole
Lorraine Connelly-Northey
Brian Martin
Sean Miller
Clinton Nain
Steaphan Paton
Reko Rennie
Steven Rhall
Yhonnie Scarce
Raymond Young