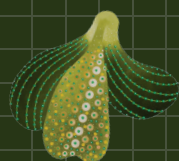
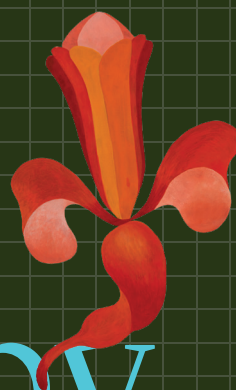
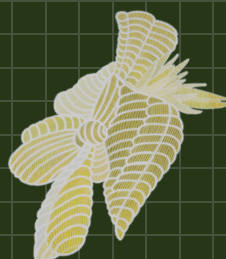
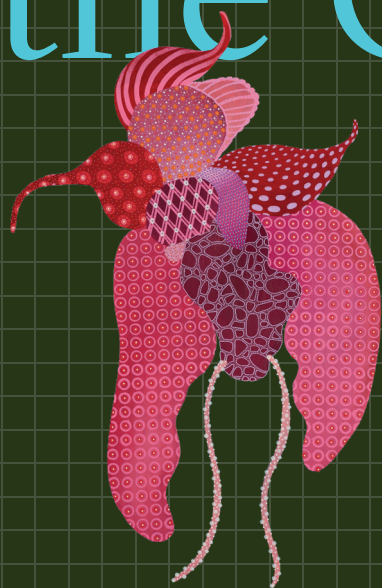
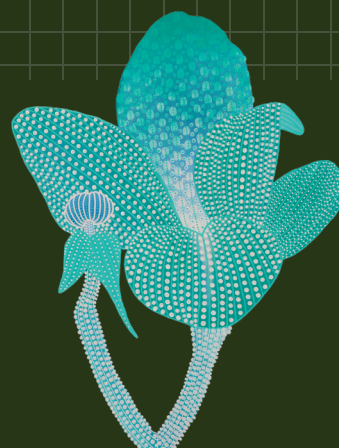




Above the Canopy



TOWN HALL GALLERY
MAJOR EXHIBITION
LEARNING RESOURCE



Above the Canopy

TOWN HALL GALLERY
MAJOR EXHIBITION
LEARNING RESOURCE



'Above the Canopy' is a major exhibition at Town Hall Gallery celebrating the rich and diverse beauty of the Australian natural environment. The exhibition features artists Sarah Hendy, Janet Laurence, Michael McHugh, Rebecca Mayo, Catherine Nelson, Grant Stevens and Judy Watson.

Including installation, photography, painting, animation and textiles, each artwork on display provides a unique, captivating and considered approach towards the beauty of our natural environment while exploring concerns for climate action and the need to protect the planet for future generations.

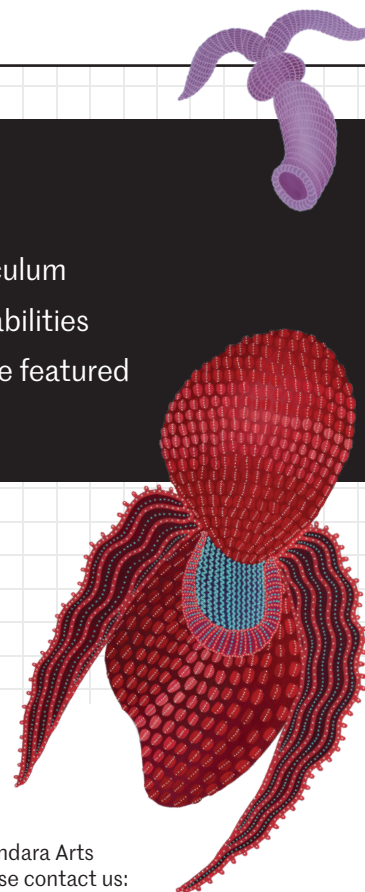
This exhibition provides a range of thought-provoking contexts which offer opportunities to explore contemporary issues around nature and sustainability.

This learning guide is aimed at supporting students and teachers to engage in discussion and activities before, during and after a visit to the 'Above the Canopy' exhibition. It can be used in conjunction with 'Wild City', a special community artwork developed by artist Kathy Holowko.

Through images and information about the artists and artworks, students are encouraged to participate in discussion and research to enhance their understanding of key themes around sustainability.

This resource includes:

1. Preparation for teachers
2. Learning about Sustainability and the Victorian Curriculum
3. Curriculum Links: Levels 3-6 Learning Areas and Capabilities
4. Discussion points and activities relating to some of the featured artists and artworks



More Information:

For more information about the Learn with Boroondara Arts program, education resources and activities, please contact us:



Above the Canopy

PREPARATION FOR TEACHERS

1. STRUCTURING YOUR TOUR

This document includes a description of each artist's work in the exhibition, questions to ask your students followed by information which can help you inform their responses and conclude the conversation when your class is ready to move on.

There are seven artists featured in 'Above the Canopy'. Allocate up to 15 minutes to discuss with your class and adjust as required.

The curatorial team have provided recommendations for which artists to focus on depending on how much time you have allocated to view 'Above the Canopy' with your class:

Time	Recommended structure
35 - 55 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Walk through the exhibition with your class and allow students time to contemplate the exhibition independently (5 - 10 minutes) 2. Janet Lawrence (10 - 15 minutes) 3. Michael McHugh (10 - 15 minutes) 4. Catherine Nelson and conclusion (10 - 15 minutes)
45 - 70 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Walk through the exhibition with your class and allow students time to contemplate the exhibition independently (5 - 10 minutes) 2. Janet Lawrence (10 - 15 minutes) 3. Michael McHugh (10 - 15 minutes) 4. Judy Watson (10 - 15 minutes) 5. Catherine Nelson and conclusion (10 - 15 minutes)
55 - 85 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Walk through the exhibition with your class and allow students time to contemplate the exhibition independently (5 - 10 minutes) 2. Janet Lawrence (10 - 15 minutes) 3. Rebecca Mayo (10 - 15 minutes) 4. Michael McHugh (10 - 15 minutes) 5. Judy Watson (10 - 15 minutes) 6. Catherine Nelson and conclusion (10 - 15 minutes)
75 - 115 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Walk through the exhibition with your class and allow students time to contemplate the exhibition independently (5 - 10 minutes) 2. Janet Lawrence (10 - 15 minutes) 3. Rebecca Mayo (10 - 15 minutes) 4. Michael McHugh (10 - 15 minutes) 5. Sarah Hendy (10 - 15 minutes) 6. Grant Steven (10 - 15 minutes) 7. Judy Watson (10 - 15 minutes) 8. Catherine Nelson and conclusion (10 - 15 minutes)

Above the Canopy

PREPARATION FOR TEACHERS



2. LEARNING ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY AND THE VICTORIAN CURRICULUM

This guide is designed to navigate the artwork in 'Above the Canopy' through the theme of sustainability. Sustainability is a cross-curriculum priority embedded in the Victorian Curriculum F-10.

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority have identified *three organising ideas* that reflect the essential knowledge, understanding and skills for the Sustainability priority.

Systems - explore the interdependent and dynamic nature of systems that support all life on Earth and our collective wellbeing

- The biosphere is a dynamic system providing conditions that sustain life on Earth.
- All life forms, including human life, are connected through ecosystems on which they depend for their wellbeing and survival.
- Sustainable patterns of living rely on the interdependence of healthy social, economic and ecological systems.

World views - enables a diversity of world views on ecosystems, values and social justice to be discussed and recognised when determining individual and community actions for sustainability

- World views that recognise the dependence of living things on healthy ecosystems, and value diversity and social justice are essential for achieving sustainability.
- World views are formed by experiences at personal, local, national and global levels, and are linked to individual and community actions for sustainability.

Futures - aimed at building capacities for thinking and acting in ways that are necessary to create a more sustainable future

- The sustainability of ecological, social and economic systems is achieved through informed individual and community action that values local and global equity and fairness across generations into the future.
- Actions for a more sustainable future reflect values of care, respect and responsibility, and require us to explore and understand environments.
- Designing action for sustainability requires an evaluation of past practices, the assessment of scientific and technological developments, and balanced judgments based on projected future economic, social and environmental impacts.
- Promoting reflective thinking processes in young people and empower them to design action that will lead to more a more equitable and sustainable future.
- Sustainable futures result from actions designed to preserve and/or restore the quality and uniqueness of environments.





Above the Canopy

PREPARATION FOR TEACHERS

3. CURRICULUM LINKS: LEVELS 3-6 LEARNING AREAS AND CAPABILITIES

Science and Geography:

Levels 3 and 4

- Science knowledge helps people to understand the effects of their actions (VCSSU056)
- Earth's surface changes over time as a result of natural processes and human activity (VCSSU062)
- Different living things have different life cycles and depend on each other and the environment to survive (VCSSU058)

Levels 5 and 6

- The growth and survival of living things are affected by the physical conditions of their environment (VCSSU075)
- Living things have structural features and adaptations that help them to survive in the environment (VCSSU074)
- Sudden geological changes or extreme weather conditions can affect Earth's surface (VCSSU079)
- Impacts of bushfires or floods on environments and communities, and how people can respond (VCGGK095)

Visual Arts and English:

Levels 3 and 4

- Explore different ways of displaying artworks to enhance their meaning for an audience (VCAVAP027)
- Identify and discuss how ideas are expressed in artworks from a range of places, times and cultures, including artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (VCAVAR028)

Critical and Creative Thinking:

Levels 3 and 4

- Examine and use the structure of a basic argument, with an aim, reasons, and conclusion to present a point of view (VCCCTR013)

Levels 5 and 6

- Consider when analogies might be used in expressing a point of view and how they should be expressed and evaluated (VCCCTR026)



Above the Canopy

PREPARATION FOR TEACHERS

4. DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE FEATURED ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS

With your class, stand in front of Janet Laurence's artwork, 'Breath of the Forest' (2020).

For the last decade, artist Janet Laurence has researched plants and trees to create this series of hanging silk veils. Each veil features a printed tree while slow moving images of forests and animal inhabitants, such as koalas, possums and bees are projected over.

The artist has used photographs of trees from important forests in Tasmania, known for being old-growth forests. For example, the Styx Valley is famous for having some of the tallest trees in the world. Some are more than 500 years old and for decades people have fought to protect them from logging.

Her work reminds us that art can provoke its audience into a renewed awareness about the fragility of our environment.

Ask Your Class:

What is the artwork is made from? What is visually represented in each element?

Each hanging veil features a printed tree while slow moving images of forests and animal inhabitants, such as koalas, possums and bees are projected over.

By layering together visual elements through physical and digital media, Janet Laurence is representing how different living things depend on each other to survive. She also wants her works to move to symbolise the liveliness of the forest.

Describe the size of the work. How does the size of the artwork make you feel?

It is big and surrounds you. It looks like you can walk through it. Perhaps you can put your hand out and the image will be lit up on your hand.

The large scale is intended to immerse the viewer, emphasising how important the natural environment is to our lives and our survival.

Why does the artist use images of trees from old forests in her work?

The artist is concerned about our environment. Despite some of these trees surviving hundreds of years they are part of an ecosystem that is very fragile and vulnerable especially to human actions. A lot of the animals you see in Janet Laurence's work are endangered. If the forests are destroyed, they will not survive.





4. DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE FEATURED ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS

Continued

With your class, stand in front of Rebecca Mayo's artwork 'At work with worms' (2020).

Rebecca Mayo is interested the relationship between creatures and humans in urban environments, including the activity of worms and rats living in her own backyard.

While moving between Melbourne and Canberra, Mayo's overgrown garden became a site of unexpected interest. Each weekend, Mayo tended to the worms in their compost and observed the activity of local rats attracted to their overgrown yard and neighbouring cafes and restaurants.

ASK YOUR CLASS:

Look at the paper in this work. What do you think happened to these pages?

Rebecca Mayo read a book written over 140 years ago by Charles Darwin who spent 40 years watching earthworms and the way their behaviour affected their environment.

Mayo printed pages of this book and fed it to worms in her garden then put those pages on display in a gallery. The Rats that lived in her garden ate the pages too!

What do you think about letting worms and rats eat the paper? How long did it take?

Worms and rats may not be the cutest animals to humans, but they live very close to humans in our gardens and suburbs. Worms and rats rely on human activity and the way that we live to survive. We also rely on them! Worms eat the earth which makes it better for growing plants that humans can eat. Perhaps there is a compost at school or at home that uses worms to recycle food scraps and other organic material.

The artist has created this work to show how all life forms, including humans, are connected through ecosystems and work together to survive.



IMAGE CREDIT: Rebecca Mayo, 'At work with worms', 2020, laser etched and worm-eaten paper, light boxes, 180 x 19.5 x 180cm, image courtesy of the artist. Photography by Brenton McGeachie.



4. DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE FEATURED ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS

Continued

With your class, stand in front of Michael McHugh's artwork 'SWIMMING IN THE CLOUDS' (2022).

Michael McHugh's paintings are of abstract forms with a strong connection to the natural world. McHugh collects a range of different photographs and drawings during research trips to museums, libraries, and gardens around the world. He uses his research to create collages which inform his large paintings.

McHugh's artwork features plant forms, some that perhaps no longer exist and others that are imaginings of what could exist in the future, as result of our environment adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Ask Your Class:

What has the artist painted in this painting?

Michael McHugh has used science books, pictures, and has researched flowers and plants around the world to inspire his paintings.

Do you recognise every flower and plant in the painting?

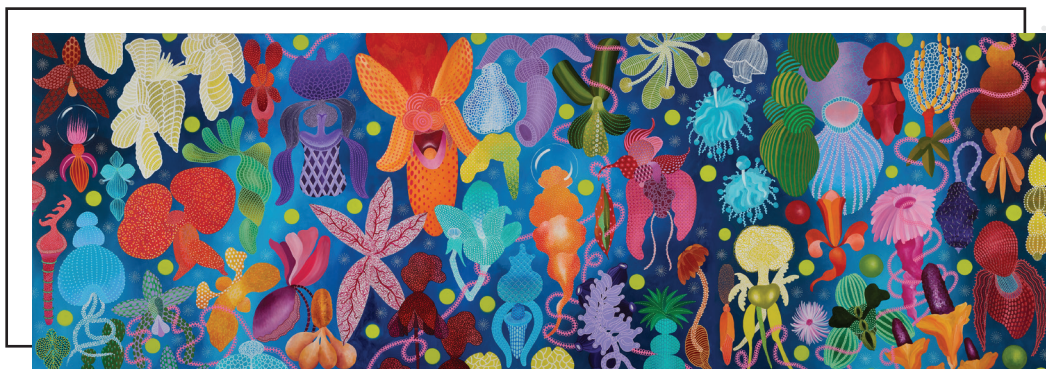
Some of these plants no longer exist and the artist relies of science books and museums to figure out what they once looked like.

However, he has also imagined how our changing environment might cause new species of flowers to be created. He believes these plants will adapt to new environments and physical conditions.

What conditions do you think plants will have to adapt to in the future?

Perhaps very cold or very warm weather conditions. Perhaps more plants will need to grow around lots of water or in very dry conditions?

Michael McHugh thinks rising water levels will mean new plants will grow that are a mixture of plants found on land and under the sea.





4. DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE FEATURED ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS

Continued

With your class, stand in front of Grant Steven's artwork 'The Forest' (2020).

Drawing on the visual languages of video games and the wellness industry, Grant Stevens 'The Forest' is an endless panoramic experience of an immersive, idealised computer-generated forest with sound. The work is an homage to the natural environment and a satire of wellbeing initiatives and their claims to rejuvenation.

The digital simulation uses stock imagery of nature including waterfalls, terrain and trees which are assembled through algorithms to create an infinite, picturesque landscape devoid of animal life.

Ask Your Class:

What do you think about or feel when looking at this video? Is this a real forest?

Forests, rivers, snowy mountains.

Calm, peaceful, relaxed.

The forest depicted in Stevens' work does not look real. It looks like a video game, or a tv ad for something like bottled water or a holiday.

Grant Stevens created this whole video on his computer, he did not go to the forest to film to create this video. This video is a close resemblance of reality, but it is not close enough to tricking us that it is real.

How would you feel if you could never see a forest like this in real life but only a computer recreation?

Sad or stressed.

Even though forests are often shown in art, video games and tv as very peaceful, beautiful places, Grant Stevens wants to remind us that looking at a forest is very different to being in a real forest.

The artist wants to make sure people remember how important and special these places are so that we take care of them for generations to come. If we use them in tv ads to sell things we should also work hard to take care of them.





4. DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE FEATURED ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS

Continued

With your class, stand in front of Sarah Hendy's artwork 'Tweed River' (2018).

Sarah Hendy's series 'Waiting For Daybreak' is characterised by lush, rich plant growth. Her landscapes are crowded with delicate ferns, giant stinging trees, figs, booyongs and flame trees. These paintings celebrate the rich biodiversity in Australia.

In 2017 Hendy was washed away in a flood in the middle of the night during Ex-Tropical Cyclone Debbie. She spent a night badly injured and stranded in the middle of the rainforest waiting to be rescued. The artist created these artworks to reflect what happened to her but despite this terrible experience, Hendy's paintings emphasise the beauty and awe of the Australian landscape.

Hendy paints each landscape onto glass. She starts at the back of the glass which means painting the highlights first and the background last. As a result, she cannot view the work until it is finished and cannot change it later. This technique represents the uniqueness and fragility of our natural environment. The artwork requires absolute care to keep it from breaking and the artist has only one chance to create it.

Ask Your Class:

What do you think about or feel when looking at these paintings?

Trees, rocks, river, plants, ferns.

Happy calm, peace, quiet. The red painting may produce different answers like angry or strange.

Some of the trees are fallen over and branches broken.

When the Sarah Hendy painted these works, she was painting the environment from her memory. To recreate her experience, she had to remember what it was like to be stuck in the forest with a broken leg for a whole night while she waited to be rescued.

What do you think she was feeling when she was stuck in the forest?

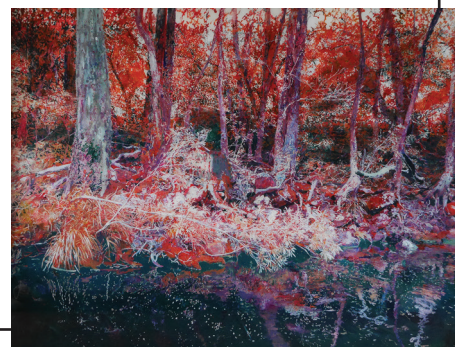
Scared, worried, hurt, hungry, cold.

Sarah Hendy was stuck because a cyclone caused a flood that washed her tent away. What do you think about when looking at these paintings now?

Scared, worried. Perhaps confused because the paintings look very pretty.

Even though the artist was very scared, she does not blame the forest and still thinks nature is very beautiful.

Natural disasters such as cyclones and floods impact our environment, but nature is strong and can grow and adapt to these changes.





4. DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE FEATURED ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS

Continued

With your class, stand in front of Judy Watson's artwork 'australia mean temperature anomaly' (2021) and 'fire danger rating' (2021).

Judy Watson's Aboriginal matrilineal family is from Waanyi country in north-west Queensland. The artist explores sites, archives and memory to reveal Indigenous histories within the landscape.

Judy Watson's canvas works in the exhibition incorporate scientific data, specifically systems for measuring Australia's median temperature and fire danger. 'fire danger rating' (2021) features roadside signage, familiar to those travelling along regional road networks, overlaid with the silhouette of a burnt tree. 'australian mean temperature anomaly' (2021) shows staggering graphs of rising temperatures against an atmospheric, vivid green background referencing regrowth of Australian forests after the devastating 2020 bushfires.

These works convey the lasting impressions of human presence on the landscape and the practices contributing to climate change. Judy's works also reflects the dual role fire plays in our lives, both as a looming threat but also as a vital part of creating new life.

Ask Your Class:

Why do you think the artist included graphs and fire warning signs in their paintings?

Students may recognise the 'fire danger rating' from holidays to the beach or to the country. The graph going up represents Australia's temperature becoming hotter and hotter each year due to global warming.

Hotter temperatures mean threat of fires are more likely, so the two graphs and the warning signs are directly connected with each other.

Why is there a piece of coal next to the artist's paintings?

Judy Watson uses the coal to represent the connection between humans using fossil fuels such as coal, and global warming.

According to scientific research, the earth's rising temperature is impacting our environment through disasters such as bushfires.

Do you think fire is always bad?

No, fire keeps people warm and alive. Regular safe and planned burning of forest areas in Australia is important part to preventing more devastating bushfires.

First Nations people use cultural knowledge of fire to understand its place in this country as a necessary part of creating new life. Judy Watson has included bright green in her work, to symbolise the growth of new life that often happens after fire.



IMAGE CREDIT: Installation view, 'Above the Canopy, Town Hall Gallery, 2022. 'australia mean temperature anomaly' and 'fire danger rating' by Judy Watson is pictured. Photography by Christian Capurro.



4. DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE FEATURED ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS

Continued

With your class, stand in front of Catherine Nelson's artwork 'Gully' (2014).

Catherine Nelson uses computer collaging techniques to transfer hundreds of photographs of nature from their 'reality' into a more painterly, imagined world of her devising. 'Gully' is a nostalgic reimagining of the artist's experiences growing up in Sydney and the thrilling, endless exploration available in vast suburban parks. Scaled up large and installed on the gallery wall, a feeling of enormity in the landscape is captured as if through the eyes of a child.

Ask Your Class:

What do you think the artist has done to this photograph?

What does it look like?

Catherine Nelson has used a computer to twist the images of trees and gardens. She wants it to look like a strange paradise where trees keep growing and growing.

The artist does this to convey the way she felt as a kid, looking at large trees while playing and exploring nature which one of her favourite things to do.

Do you enjoy going outside and being in nature? What do you like about it?

Playing and exploring. The colours. The way being outside makes me feel. Time shared with friends and family.

Do you think caring about the environment is important?

Hopefully, answers will be, yes!

