



CASULA POWERHOUSE ARTS CENTRE
Secondary Education Kit

REFUGEES

30 July - 11 September 2016

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INTRODUCTION

Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre is proud to exhibit the work of renowned international and Australian artists such as Yoko Ono, Anish Kapoor, Max Ernst and Christian Boltanski, all of whom share a refugee background.

Within the current political climate, *Refugees* is an opportunity to celebrate the talent and achievement of people who have fled war-torn countries, endured persecution, and become culturally displaced. Their stories have made for powerfully moving and provocative artworks that explore issues of identity, community and trauma.

The context of this exhibition aims to encourage a discussion regarding Australia's relationship with refugees and asylum seekers.

As part of the *Refugees* exhibition, a variety of educational and public programs that have been developed for the public and educational communities. These programs are aimed to encourage discussion surrounding the issue of refugees, as well as unite and bring communities together.

Our NOW SEE HEAR: *conversations across borders* see two distinct cultural groups (Jewish and Islamic Stage 5 students) conversing over their shared hobbies and interests. While, ON SIDE aims to encourage community engagement through a united football match, taking its

conceptual inspiration from Yoko Ono's *Play it By Trust* (1966/2015). Participants will play against one another in the same colour, making it impossible to tell each other apart.

Furthermore, through our educational and public programs we want to encourage a discussion surrounding the issue of refugees and asylum seekers. In partnership with Westwords, we are opening a dialogue with Stage 3 students about people in detention, by engaging students to partake in our *Post-Future* project. *Post-Future* will teach students literacy and visual skills, and at the conclusion of the project sees them sending an original artwork and personal letter to people in detention.

In conjunction with *Refugees*, the Kids Gallery will display *Sun Screens*, paste ups by Mandy Schöne- Salter, a local female street artist. During the continuation of the show the gallery will be transformed by numerous members of the public and school communities.

If you would like any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Roy Marchant, Producer Public Programs or Cayn Rosmarin, Education and Public Programs Officer.

This education kit aims to highlight the practices of a number of selected artists from the *Refugees* exhibition. By discussing the practices of Christian Boltanski, Ah Xian, Khadim Ali and Anish Kapoor, the education kit will highlight specific elements and aspects of their artistic practice.

Christian Boltanski

Christian Boltanski is a French multidisciplinary artist whose mediums include photography, sculpture and installation art. The son of a Polish Jew, Boltanski grew up concealing his Jewish identity in post WWII France. His work explores the link between death, memory, and identity. The artist, though, insists it is open to a series of meanings and interpretations. His works are always **imbued** with the sensation of human tragedy in the wake of **the Holocaust**.

Boltanski's practice involves recovering black and white photographs of Jewish school children from 1930s Vienna found in flea markets and recontextualising these in site-specific installations. Inherent in his curation of images is the human fascination for cataloguing our lives, of piecing together an archive of **sociocultural** and personal histories. Boltanski combines these photographs with other ephemeral materials such as newspaper clippings, clothing and old biscuit tins, objects that people tend to collect and accumulate in forgotten places over time.

The seemingly innocent photograph *Children Playing* (1991) depicts a boy with a toy pistol standing over his friend, who is playing dead. In *Bathtime* (1991), the sense of childhood play is echoed, but it is also a scene of family love as a mother smiles fondly at her laughing, bathing children. *Dog in the Street* (1991) and *Toys* (1991) share the signs of care from their owners. Framed by the cold metal tins, these images say very little on their own, but when assembled together, are figured as reconstructions of a lived experience. A playful scene not uncommon to boyhood suddenly takes on a sinister quality when viewed under the lens of the Nazi regime, and even the purest moments are overshadowed by the ache of grief and loss as the viewer finds themselves asking, where are these people now? Are they victims of a violent history?

The added element of light features heavily throughout Boltanski's work, and used here it essentially 'shines a light' on the degree to which individual identity is lost to a collective experience. In spite of the unnamed faces in these eerie, altar-like constructions, the people they loved and the objects they might have owned, there is an overwhelming sense of anonymity, a memorial to no one in particular. The light within his works highlight ideas of domestication and home, seen through the use of everyday desk lamps.

Years 9 and 10

Use the Subjective Frame to discuss how the artwork makes you feel. What do you think the artist's intention was?

Years 11 and 12

Use the Postmodern and Structural Frames to discuss how Boltanski creates meaning from the composition of found objects.

Activity Using found objects such as photographs and other items, create a visual narrative of an imagined lived experience. Ask different people to describe the 'life' of the person they are viewing to see how their interpretations differ.



Christian Boltanski

Dog in Street; Toys; Bathtime and Children Playing 1991

gelatin silver photograph, biscuit box,

lamp and electrical wire, installation

dimensions variable.

Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales

- Mervyn Horton Bequest Fun 1994

Photo AGNSW © Christian Boltanski/ADAGP.

Licensed by Viscopy, 2016

Ah Xian

Ah Xian is a Sydney-based, Chinese-born artist who spent five years fighting for asylum in Australia in the wake of the **Tiananmen Square massacre**. Xian is drawn to traditional Chinese mediums such as porcelain, cloisonné and jade to create human busts and full-body sculptures.

Xian's artistic practice involves casting porcelain busts of his own family members, which are then painted by craftspeople from Jingdezhen, the centre of China's porcelain trade. His work has been described as a tension of oppositions: of the personal and the political, of the decorative motifs of the East and sculptural traditions of the West.

His *China China* series (1999) consists of 40 bust casts hand-painted with Chinese motifs such as dragons, lotus flowers, and birds. *China China Bust 81* is a white porcelain bust with subtle cobalt blue motifs that seem to glide over the glazed, liquid-like surface of the bust. It has the likeness of a Buddha in the soft lines of the closed eyes and the serene set of the mouth. An intricately painted **pagoda** towers above a craggy hill on the bust's nose, drawing the viewer down the column of the throat to the misted mountains and trees below that spread all the way across the bust's back. At first glance, the painted scene is reminiscent of the crockery that has been found in many a kitchen, but Xian has appropriated the traditional art form often dismissed as craft to stunning proportions, **re-instigating** the artistic and cultural value of what has become an everyday commodity in the Western world.

The artist's **ingenuity** and contemporary approach in combining ancient art forms to produce the often intricately detailed three-dimensional body casts he is known for allow him to explore ideas about identity and cultural belonging he was previously unable to investigate in a climate of political unrest and fear of persecution.

Years 9 and 10

Xian is a former refugee who lives in Sydney but returns to his country of birth, China, to produce his artworks. Use the Subjective and Cultural Frames to discuss how you think Xian's busts explore the idea of identity.

Years 11 and 12

Xian uses motifs and techniques of painting that are traditionally associated with the decoration of vases of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties. How successfully do you think the Structural and Postmodern Frames interact with each other to produce sculpture that is vastly different?

Activity Xian combines eastern and western art traditions in a contemporary way. Consider ways to combine different traditions to produce something unique, e.g. masks from Papua New Guinea made from industrial materials.



Ah Xian

China, China - Bust 81 2004

glazed porcelain

40 x 39.5 x 22.5 cm

Museum of Contemporary Art, gift of the artist, 2008

image courtesy the artist and Museum of Contemporary Art

Australia © the artist

Khadim Ali

Khadim Ali is a Sydney-based artist who creates large-scale paintings in the **Mughal** and **Kabul** miniature traditions. Born in Pakistan, Ali grew up amongst a community of exiled Hazaras, an ethnic minority in the town of Quetta that sits on the Afghan border.

Ali uses the courtly-bound techniques of miniature painting including the fine-haired tools of squirrel and kitten hair brushes to create exquisite and painstaking paintings that can take up to several years to complete (due to their large scale). He also employs traditional weavers from Kabul to create giant wool rugs of his scenes.

Ali is largely inspired by Ferdowsi's epic Persian poem *Shahnameh*, or Book of Kings. He often depicts scenes and characters from the poem, notably the heroic figure of Rostam, who symbolises the good and dark sides of humanity.

These paintings from *The Haunted Lotus series* (2012-2014) are delicate in colour and technique, with intricate and precise paintwork against muted, sandy washes. To further emphasise the complex moral conflict of the individual, Rostam and other figures are represented as demons with gnarled horns. In spite of their demonic appearance, they are non-threatening, with **gluttonous**, pudgy bellies, soft wisened faces, and large white wings.

In the *Transitions/Evacuations series* (2014), crimson **calligraphic** forms seem to float around towers of geometric scaffolding like prayers; demons lifting heavy machinery while beasts pounce over them conjure up images of Egyptian slaves building the pyramids, creating the sense of the weak succumbing to a powerful authority.

The gold leaf in the paintings gives the feeling of an illuminated manuscript, reminiscent of a traditional mode of storytelling in miniature painting. Ali brings a contemporary, **allegorical** approach to his work as he depicts the stories of the **dehumanised** Hazaras under the Taliban rule.

Through his paintings, Ali explores issues of cultural displacement and migration as someone who straddles multiple identities as a Pakistani, Afghan and Australian.

Years 9 and 10

Use the Subjective and Cultural Frames to discuss the themes, you think have been conveyed by Ali's paintings.

Years 11 and 12

Consider all the Frames to discuss and critique Ali's practice in relation to the genre of miniature painting.

Activity Khadim uses allegory in his paintings to represent the plight of the Hazaras as scenes inspired from *Shahnameh*. Create a painting that uses a traditional narrative to tell a modern-day story.



Khadim Ali
Untitled from the Transitions / Evacuation series 2014
Merino wool, afghan wool
and cotton
307 x 240 cm
Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Anish Kapoor

Anish Kapoor is a Mumbai-born artist who is well known for his large-scale abstract public sculptures. Born to a Hindu father and an Iraqi-Jewish mother, Kapoor first moved to Israel and lived in a **kibbutz** before moving to London to study art.

His feelings of being an outsider provoked him to consider sculptural forms in a different way, combining geometric shapes with organic forms and a Modernist sentiment. Kapoor discovered that with the application of colour in a high intensity pigment, a concave object could negate the idea of its own outer surface and give the **vortex**-like illusion of disappearing into itself.

The most notable element of Kapoor's artwork is his interest in "**the void**", the exploration of negative space, and the **polarities** of presence and absence. Kapoor has described his void works as non-form, non-objects that can be likened to icebergs, where most of the object feels hidden beneath the surface of the gallery wall.

Untitled (2002) is a highly lacquered recessive disc of stainless steel that appears to be sinking into the wall. Its deep garnet gloss is so polished that even our own reflection is distorted in its **delineated** cavity. Kapoor's fascination with the manipulation of form is also one experienced by the viewer as they navigate the work for themselves. Approaching the work from the side sees the sculpture go from a floating semicircle that blends seamlessly to a disc of pure colour when viewed from the front. Our perception of space is distorted, as is our experience of the artwork as they melt in to each other.

Similarly, *Hollow* (2012) is an example of pigment and light working together to create the illusion of a something rising out of nowhere. The sculpture has been molded in such a way that it is almost impossible to distinguish where it meets the wall on which it is hung, highlighting the gap between what is known and what is seen.

The scale of the artworks and the play between depth and surface engulfs the viewer in a meditative state, inviting the viewer to the inner reaches of imagination.

Years 9 and 10

Use the Structural and Subjective Frames to discuss how you think Kapoor relies on elements such as light and colour to manipulate the artwork's form and our experience of it.

Years 11 and 12

Consider the non-object nature of Kapoor's void pieces. Using the Postmodern Frame, discuss how the artist challenges traditional beliefs about sculpture.

Activity Kapoor uses light and colour to manipulate the form his sculptures take, as well as giving the sense that part of them is hidden beneath the surface. Experiment with other elements to create an artwork that gives similar illusions of space. Is it possible to create an artwork that gives the illusion of infinite space?



Anish Kapoor

Untitled 2002

stainless steel and lacquer

150 x 120 x 34 cm

Art Gallery of New South Wales – Gift of Geoff Ainsworth AM

2015. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural

Gifts Program.

Photo AGNSW

© Anish Kapoor/DACS. Licensed by Viscopy, 2016

Yoko Ono

Yoko Ono is a multi-media artist and musician, who is also known for association with John Lennon. Born in Tokyo in 1933, Ono grew up during World War II and lived in Tokyo during the great-firebombing of March 9, 1945. After the war, Ono moved to New York and became active in the **avant-garde** art scene.

Ono is known as the high priestess of happenings and a pioneer of performance art. She was a key member in the **Fluxus** movement in the 1960's, which took influence and inspiration from Dadaism. Ono rejects the notion that an artwork must be a material object, and often her works take the forms of instructions and ideas. Hence, often participation is central to her works. Participants and gallery visitors help to actively create meaning to the works.

The key idea to her practice is that artworks exist as ideas first and foremost. Her works vary from remaining as written instruction to be visualised in one's mind, to others being realised as physical objects years later. While, some works are made several times for example *Play it by Trust* (1966/2015). Ono uses every day and traditional mediums within her artworks, but her strong emphasis on idea makes her one of the key early pioneers of conceptual and idea art.

A work that exemplifies Ono's idea of minimalism and lack of materiality is evident in *Play it by Trust* (1966/2015). The piece is an all-white chessboard with the following instructions:

Play it for as long as you can remember/who is your opponent and/ who is your own self.

The work encourages visitors to participate in a game of chess, but becoming **indistinguishable** from one's opponent becomes a central problem to the work. It represents Ono's strong anti-war sentiments as the idea of competition is undermined within the work. She wants players to see beyond the black and white chess set and promote a sense of community and unity through the blank white chess set. As Ono comments "peace is attained on a small scale" as the game is destabilised.

At the heart of Ono's practice is the human experience. Her experience as a migrant from Japan to the United States after World War II influenced her ideas of equality and the power of art as a tool for activism and equality.

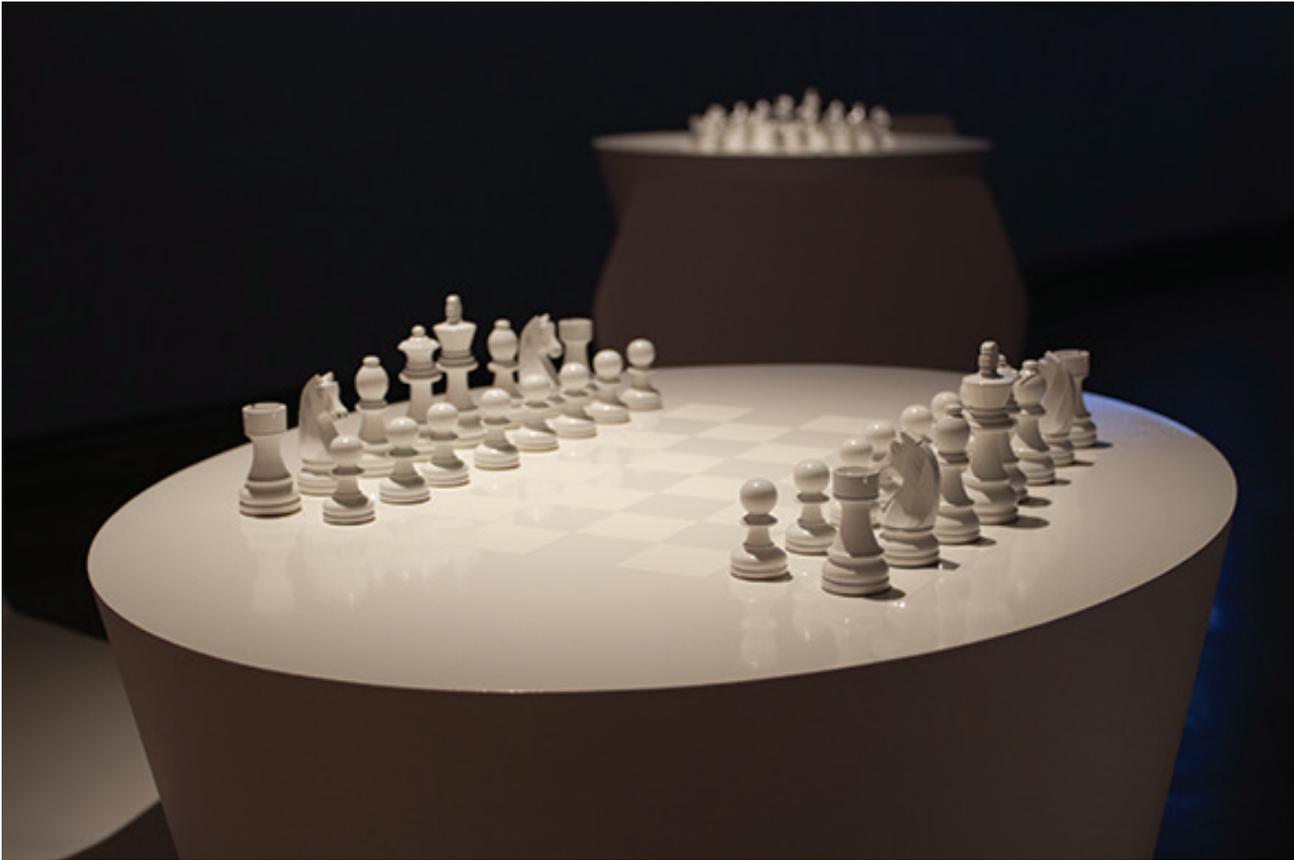
Years 9 and 10

Use the Subjective Frame to analysis and discuss the artist's intention with the artwork, *Play it By Trust* (1966/2015).

Years 11 and 12

Referencing the Conceptual Framework, discuss the audience's role in the formation and creation of meaning in Yoko Ono's artworks. Give specific examples.

Activity With reference to *Play it By Trust*, in groups of three, develop ideas of for a participatory artwork. When developing the work you should think about the materiality and intention of the work.



Yoko Ono

Play It By Trust 1966/2013

installation view, War is Over! (if you want it):

Yoko Ono, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia,

2013 wooden chess set, table, chairs

Museum of Contemporary Art, gift of the artist, 2014

Image courtesy the artist and Museum of Contemporary Art

Australia © the artist

Mordant Family Collection

GLOSSARY

Avant-garde: new and experimental ideas and methods in art, music or literature.

Allegorical: constituting or containing allegory.

Calligraphic: fancy penmanship, especially highly decorative handwriting.

Dehumanised: to deprive of human qualities or attributes; divest of individuality.

Delineated: describe or portray something precisely.

Fluxus: is an international and interdisciplinary network or movement of artists, poets, composers, and designers of the 1960s and 1970s, noted for experimental syntheses of different artistic media and disciplines.

Gluttonous: greedy; insatiable

Imbued: to inspire, as with feelings and opinions, etc.

Ingenuity: the quality of being cleverly inventive or resourceful; inventiveness

Indistinguishable: not able to be identified as different or distinct.

Kabul: The capital of Afghanistan, as well as its largest city, located in the eastern section the country.

Kibbutz: a communal settlement in Israel, typically a farm.

Mughal: any of the Mongol conquerors of India who established empire that lasted from 1526 to 1857, but held only nominal power after 1803.

Pagoda: A temple or sacred building, usually pyramid like or having upward curving roofs over the individual stories.

Polarities: the presence or manifestation of two opposite or contrasting principles or tendencies.

Re-instigating: to urge, provoke or incite to some action or course.

Sociocultural: relating to, or signifying the combination of interaction of social and cultural elements.

Tiananmen Square Massacre: In 1989 in Beijing, students led a demonstration at Tiananmen Square, which instigated the Chinese government to declare martial law. The protests were forcibly suppressed, as troops with assault rifles and tanks killed unarmed civilians trying to block the military's advance towards Tiananmen Square. The event has become known as the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

The Holocaust: The systematic mass slaughter of European Jews in Nazi concentration camps during World War II.

The Void: an empty space; emptiness.

Vortex: a whirling mass of fluid or air.

About this publication: This education kit is for secondary school students. It contains brief biographies and essays relating to the practice of selected artists from the exhibition. There are curriculum based exercises and activities for Stages 5-6 students.

Written by Ariadna Kiehn and Cayn Rosmarin.
Produced by Roy Marchant, Producer Public Programs and Education and Cayn Rosmarin Public Programs and Education Officer.

Front: **Christian Boltanski**

Dog in Street; Toys; Bathtime and Children Playing 1991
gelatin silver photograph, biscuit box,
lamp and electrical wire, installation
dimensions variable.

Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales

- Mervyn Horton Bequest Fund 1994

Photo AGNSW © Christian Boltanski/ADAGP.

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