Tamara Dean – human nature

**Course:** Stage 5 (Elective course) Visual arts / Photographic and digital media

**Topic:** Ctrl + Alt + Shift, new perspectives in art and technology

**Lesson sequence duration**: 10 lessons

**Focus content:** Frames, conceptual framework, practice

# Overview

Tamara Dean is an Australian artist working in the fields of photography, installation and video, whose work explores the relationship between humans and the natural world. After a 13 year career as a photojournalist for the Sydney Morning Herald, she transitioned to conceptual photography. The work she produces explores human relationships, transitory and milestone experiences, rituals and daily life, and her ongoing love of the natural world and the Australian bush. Tamara Dean has a considerable exhibition history and won the 2019 Moran Contemporary Photographic Prize for her work ‘Endangered’.

This learning sequence draws on the [Tamara Dean – Natur](https://vimeo.com/427671221/bc92a42ecb)e video resource. Students interpret aspects of Dean’s artmaking practice, focusing on artworks from her history of submission to the Moran Prize which includes a cross section of her documentary and conceptual photographic practice, the series ‘In Our Nature’ (2018), and her recent work ‘Escapade’ (2020). work ‘Escapade’ (2020).

Students engage in critical and historical investigations to strengthen their understanding of Tamara Dean’s artmaking practice and produce a critical response to two of her works from the ‘In Our Nature’ series.

Students engage in artmaking activities creating two photographic and digital media artworks that apply aspects of Tamara Dean’s practice and processes and reveal the relationships between humans and the physical environment.

## Outcomes

### Artmaking

Students will develop knowledge, understanding and skills to make artworks informed by their understanding of practice, the conceptual framework and the frames.

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| Area of content | Visual arts | Photographic and digital media |
| Practice | 5.1 develops range and autonomy in selecting and applying visual arts conventions and procedures to make artworks. | 5.1 develops range and autonomy in selecting and applying photographic and digital conventions and procedures to make photographic and digital works. |
| Frames | 5.3 makes artworks informed by an understanding of how the frames affect meaning. | 5.3 makes photographic and digital works informed by an understanding of how the frames affect meaning. |
| Representation | 5.4 investigates the world as a source of ideas, concepts and subject matter in the visual arts. | 5.4 investigates the world as a source of ideas, concepts and subject matter for photographic and digital works. |

### Critical and historical studies

Students will develop knowledge, understanding and skills to critically and historically interpret art informed by their understanding of practice, the conceptual framework and the frames.

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| Area of content | Visual arts | Photographic and digital media |
| Practice | 5.7 applies their understanding of aspects of practice to critical and historical interpretations of art. | 5.7 applies their understanding of aspects of practice to critically and historically interpret photographic and digital works. |
| Frames | 5.9 demonstrates how the frames provide different interpretations of art. | 5.9 uses the frames to make different interpretations of photographic and digital works. |
| Representation | 5.10 demonstrates how art criticism and art history construct meaning. | 5.10 constructs different critical and historical accounts of photographic and digital works.  |

[Visual Arts 7-10 Syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/creative-arts/visual-arts-7-10) and [Photographic and Digital Media 7-10 Syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/creative-arts/music-7-10) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2003.

### Learning intentions

Through studying this sequence of lessons students will be able to:

* investigate and apply appropriate photographic and digital media conventions and activities to make art where meaning is shaped by values and beliefs about the individual, social structures and the artworld
* develop, research and investigative skills using their visual arts diary or photographic and digital media journal to plan and conceptualise artworks
* recognise how human experience provides a creative source of ideas for artmaking by drawing on their imaginative responses, personal and family experiences and views of relationships with the natural world
* discuss and interpret different aspects of contemporary artmaking practice
* identify and seek to explain how artists and audiences use their imaginations, intuitions, sensory and deeply felt experiences, and views of beauty in making and responding to art
* identify how critical and historical accounts provide a way to understand the intentions and practices of artists
* 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.

### Cross curriculum content

Within this learning sequence, cross curriculum content is addressed and outlined below.

#### Information and communication technologies (ICT)

Throughout the study of this learning sequence, students will engage with a range of digital and photographic contemporary technologies in their artmaking practice through and in their research and investigation of critical and historical studies of art.

#### Difference and Diversity

The focus on the development of Tamara Dean’s practice fosters an understanding of how she has been influenced by the world and events. Students investigate the relationships within the conceptual framework and how personal, social and cultural differences can be examined and represented in artworks. Students focus on conventions and innovations in the representation of ideas, beliefs and perceptions about the world through the frames and conceptual framework.

#### Environment

Students focus on how the natural world is represented in a range of artworks in critical and historical studies. The relationships between artists and artworks and the use of natural, built and social environments as a source of ideas is investigated in artmaking.

## Learning sequence

### Tamara Dean – human nature

#### Students will:

* investigate how Tamara Dean and Pre-Raphaelite artists create a visual language using structural properties such as figurative arrangement as a compositional device to reveal relationships between people and the natural world
* create a series of artworks that apply aspects of Tamara Dean’s technical practice to communicate their own experiences of the world and respond to the Moran Prize photographic theme of ‘living in Australia’ using a visual language to convey meaning and tell a story
* consider how to select and apply conventions and procedures in their own artmaking practice to embed meaning in their artworks
* construct a critical and historical account of how Tamara Dean and other artists, historians, and critics have conceptualised nature in their practice
* create a composite photographic and digital media artwork, inspired by Tamara Dean’s ‘Escapade’, that uses repetition of figures within a landscape to explore how people interact with the physical environment.

##### Teacher notes

* In the artmaking activity, when making their final colour adjustments in post-production consider having students produce 2 different images with different colour adjustments and using peer or teacher feedback to determine which version has the greater impact.
* For the second artmaking activity inspired by ‘Escapade’, consider introducing a specific theme or choice from a selection of ideas for students to explore for example: isolation, anxiety, daily routines, the range of emotions they experience at school.
* Consider having students shoot more images than necessary and then using teacher or peer feedback to make editorial choices.

##### Differentiation

* In the artmaking activity, students could either work in groups of 3 – 4 to create one image or rotate between photographer/director and model/figure roles such that each student is responsible for their own image.
* In art critical and historical studies, the teacher might make a guided scaffold to support the structural analysis of the four artworks.
* For the ‘Escapade’ inspired artmaking activity, students could either work in pairs to plan and create one image, rotate between photographer/model roles such that each student is responsible for their own image, or use their camera’s self-timer to work solo.
* Students could shoot more images than necessary and make informed editorial/curatorial selections as to which images work best in their artwork.
* As an extension activity, students could consider how they could work at home/outside the school environment to complete their photoshoots.

#### Ongoing assessment/feedback

* Formative assessment collected throughout Artmaking and Critical and Historical activities, to be recorded in student’s diaries/journals.
* Summative assessment activities (completed artworks, paragraph response) could be developed into formal assessment tasks

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| Lesson | Teaching strategies | Assessment | Resources |
| Lesson 1 | **Critical and historical studies** **Learning intention**Investigate, discuss and interpret different aspects of the contemporary artmaking practice of Tamara Dean.**Lesson steps*** Introduction to the artmaking practice of Tamara Dean. Students are asked to divide their page into three columns. At the top of the first column, they write the title ‘ideas / inspiration’, at the top of the second column they write the title ‘materials / techniques’ and at the top of the third column they write the title ‘artworks/date’. Students are asked to make notes under these headings while viewing the video resource [Tamara Dean – nature](https://vimeo.com/427671221/bc92a42ecb) (00:10:05). Teacher might choose to stop video to allow time to support note making and check understanding of new or unfamiliar words and phrases. Differentiation- teacher might support student notetaking with a faculty created scaffold.
* On completion of the video, students share their notes on Tamara Dean’s practice with peers in small groups of 2-3 and add to their own summaries with new ideas.
* Students then consolidate new understandings about Tamara Dean’s practice by completing an individual writing task where they create 4 interview questions that they would ask her. These might be about her artmaking intentions, choices, and actions; and the way she explores relationships between humans and the natural world in her artmaking practice. Once they have written four questions, they then also construct paragraphs imagining her responses to each question and drawing on their notes and knowledge.

**Extension**Students might engage in practice interviews with each other practicing their questions and responses and adopting the role of the art critic/ journalist and the artist.  | Formative assessment:Student notes recorded Visual Arts DiaryFormative assessment:Completed writing task in diary or journal.  | [Tamara Dean – Nature](https://vimeo.com/427671221/bc92a42ecb) (vimeo link, 00:10:05) |
| Lesson 2 | **Artmaking and critical and historical studies** **Learning intention** Students identify and explain how Tamara Dean and other artists use structural elements such as a visual language including composition, lighting and figurative staging to create images that communicate personal and social narratives about our relationship with nature. **Lesson steps*** Introduction – Students are asked to consider Tamara Dean’s career trajectory from newspaper photographer capturing real life newsworthy moments to successful photographic artist. They are directed to look at their list of artworks from the previous lesson (the third column) and the list of Tamara Dean’s Moran Prize entries from the Tamara Dean [resource booklet](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/visual-arts/stage-4-5/ctl-alt-shift/creativearts-visualarts-resource-ctrlaltshift-tamaradean-resourcebooklet-s5.docx).
* Dean’s early works were influenced by her surroundings and friendship groups. Students consider the difference between candid and staged forms of photography. Teacher suggests that a spectrum exists between manufactured and staged scenes such as an advertisement or fashion shoot and completely candid scenarios like photojournalism, or documentary photography, and street photography. Question for class – Where can we place a range of Tamara Dean’s works on that spectrum?
* Students are asked to identify two works that have a documentary approach and two works that are more carefully staged and conceptual in nature and to explain reasons for their choices.
* Tamara Dean states in the video that she has been influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite painters and photographers. Teacher asks class if any students are aware of these artists? Responses shared.
* Teacher then shares a selection of works from the online slideshow resource ‘The Pre-Raphaelite Lens’ and explains to the class that together they will make a list of structural properties and techniques common to these artists. Through sharing selected images in the resource and questioning, this list is created on the board. Teacher explains that this small group of British artists of the 1840s and 50s worked in the open air and tried to capture seasonal details and the beauty of the natural world including its topography and vegetation. They were inspired by the detail in early renaissance paintings made before the life of artist Raphael.
* Notes – Pre-Raphaelite photographers carefully staged their photographs using a range of techniques. This included working with figures and arranging their hair, posture, attire, pose and the background to create poetic scenes or intimate and emotional moments. Questioning and reading from the online resource draws out some of these common properties.
* Teacher asks students to examine again the Moran Prize images in the Tamara Dean [resource booklet](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/visual-arts/stage-4-5/ctl-alt-shift/creativearts-visualarts-resource-ctrlaltshift-tamaradean-resourcebooklet-s5.docx). Like the Pre-Raphaelites, Dean works in a manner that allows her to capture emotional moments in nature. Can the class add to the list of visual language and material choices already on the board? For example, students might consider that Dean positions figures relative to the lens/light source/centre of frame based on their importance in the scene, she uses body language and gaze to infer relationships between characters.
* Students pick 4 images from a selection, including 2 Tamara Dean photographs and 2 paintings/photographs from the online slideshow resource that represent figures in nature. (Note teacher might direct students to specific examples).
* Students make quick simple sketches of their selected artworks in their art diaries/journals and annotate the sketches using the structural frame. Students refer to the ideas and visual arts vocabulary already shared on the board. Student annotations comment on how figures are arranged, including the gaze, implied gesture/movement, and any other strong compositional elements such as colour, tone, spatial relationships, (for example any strong vectors or abstract shapes, simple lines that show perspective or delineate between fore- mid- and backgrounds) the light source and focal point. These annotated images could be created digitally (in Photoshop, Paint, or similar), and might include tracing over and/or annotating the original images.
 | Formative assessment:Annotated sketches in Visual Arts Diary | Tamara Dean [resource booklet](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/visual-arts/stage-4-5/ctl-alt-shift/creativearts-visualarts-resource-ctrlaltshift-tamaradean-resourcebooklet-s5.docx) – The Moran Contemporary Photographic PrizeOnline slideshow resource, accessed 16/2/2021 [The Pre-Raphaelite Lens British Photography and Painting, 1848–1875](https://www.nga.gov/features/slideshows/the-pre-raphaelite-lens.html#slide_1) |
| Lesson 3-4 | **Artmaking – Photoshoot** **Learning intention**Students apply their understanding of the visual language and compositional techniques used by Tamara Dean and the Pre-Raphaelites to create their own photographic images that respond to the theme of the Moran prize for photography. **Lesson steps*** Lesson starts with reading an interview with Tamara Dean in which she discusses her transition from photojournalism to conceptual photography, and the importance of thorough planning in making conceptual work. Tamara Dean interview extract in the Tamara Dean [resource booklet](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/visual-arts/stage-4-5/ctl-alt-shift/creativearts-visualarts-resource-ctrlaltshift-tamaradean-resourcebooklet-s5.docx)
* Think, pair, share – Students reflect on previous learning and the article extract and each create a list of five insights they have onto the working methods of Tamara Dean. Students then pair up and share their lists adding any new knowledge from their peers to their own record. Class shares ideas.
* Introduction of practical task – Review a selection of Tamara Dean’s photographs from her Moran Prize entries and also revisit the [Tamara Dean – Nature](https://vimeo.com/427671221/bc92a42ecb) (vimeo link, 10:05).
* Reflect on the [Moran Prize](https://www.moranprizes.com.au/moran-contemporary-photographic-prizes) guiding theme (paraphrased) -

The Moran Arts Foundation invites photographers to tell a story of how they experience living in Australia; places, people and lifestyle that make our lovable country quintessentially Australian.There are many ways to interpret this brief, but we are after your perspective on contemporary Australian society, your life, your dreams, your abilities, your inabilities, your mates, your loves, your environment & your landscape. We want the good, the bad, the ugly, the beautiful and the everyday. * Artmaking brief—Students are to work in groups of 3 or 4 to plan and create a digital photograph that satisfies the Moran Prize entry criteria and to give their perspective on contemporary Australian society and that also includes arranged figures and nature.
* Students will apply their knowledge of composition from previous lesson (positioning of figures, gaze and implied movement) and include at least 3 figures in their artwork. They could produce one photograph per group or rotate between photographer/director and model/figure roles until each student has their own photograph. They need to carefully plan how figures will interact in their chosen location within the school grounds and their intended meaning.
* In their planning, students should develop a sketch of their planned image that mirrors the sketching/annotation activity from the previous lesson noting all of the structural properties that they plan to include.
* The [Mise en scène: contemporary photography and film](https://sites.google.com/education.nsw.gov.au/mise-en-scne/home) resource may be helpful in guiding student planning of elements such as the setting and props, costume, hair, makeup, characters, lighting and atmosphere, point of view and perspective.

Students work in collaborative groups to plan, stage and capture their photographs within the school grounds.  |  | Tamara Dean interview extract – Tamara Dean [resource booklet](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/visual-arts/stage-4-5/ctl-alt-shift/creativearts-visualarts-resource-ctrlaltshift-tamaradean-resourcebooklet-s5.docx)[Tamara Dean – Nature](https://vimeo.com/427671221/bc92a42ecb) (vimeo link, 00:10:05)[Mise en scène: contemporary photography and film](https://sites.google.com/education.nsw.gov.au/mise-en-scne/home) resource |
| Lesson 5 | **Artmaking – Post-production****Learning intention**Students apply their knowledge of Tamara Dean’s post-production practice to make some subtle editing choices to resolve their photographic artworks.**Lesson steps*** Teacher might again show students a very short segment of the interview video. Refer to two quotes by Tamara Dean on colour from the [Tamara Dean – Nature](https://vimeo.com/427671221/bc92a42ecb) video and the [Relationships, Nature and Ritual](https://bluethumb.com.au/blog/interviews/an-interview-with-tamara-dean/) text. ‘I’ve manipulated the colours a little bit – I started with quite a green hue and – I mean I’m really inspired by the Pre-Raphaelite painters and often in those the paintings that I adore there’s this sort of magenta, this red that comes up through the shadows and that’s what I’ve aimed for in the final image.’

‘Colour is incredibly seductive. The greens I seek are not unlike the rich and vivid colour of moss. The kind of surface you want to touch. There is a tactile quality to the cotton rag paper, which coupled with the rich colour encourages the viewer to come close to the work.’* Students use Photoshop to make some subtle colour and other adjustments to complement and enhance their intended meaning/narrative. They might change the colour cast by using either the photo filter or colour balance adjustment layers. Use the vibrance adjustment layer to change the colour intensity – consider pushing the vibrance and saturation sliders in opposite directions to give the effect of colours that are muted but still have a strong presence in the image. Export the final works for storage and exhibition.
* Teacher may choose to submit student work/s to any relevant photographic prizes, including the student categories of the Moran Contemporary Photographic Prize.
 | Formative assessment:Photoshoot planning and sketches recorded in diaries or journals.Summative assessment: Completed photographic artworks. | [Tamara Dean – Nature](https://vimeo.com/427671221/bc92a42ecb) (vimeo link, 00:10:05)[Tamara Dean: Relationships, Nature and Ritual](https://bluethumb.com.au/blog/interviews/an-interview-with-tamara-dean/)[Moran Contemporary Photographic Prizes](https://www.moranprizes.com.au/moran-contemporary-photographic-prizes) |
| Lesson 6-7 | **Critical and historical studies****Learning Intention**Students consider the importance of nature and the environment as major conceptual threads in Tamara Dean’s work and compare this with art critical historical references to nature and the sublime in Romanticism and Pre-Raphaelite artmaking.**Lesson steps*** Refer to Activities 1-3 in the Tamara Dean [resource booklet](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/visual-arts/stage-4-5/ctl-alt-shift/creativearts-visualarts-resource-ctrlaltshift-tamaradean-resourcebooklet-s5.docx).
* Students complete a series of note making and interpretation tasks using readings from Tamara Dean, and art critics and historians.
* This task culminates in an extended response question and might be broken up into small activities and completed over several lessons.
 | Formative assessment:Completed summary scaffolds in Visual Arts Diary.Summative assessment:Students complete extended response. | Tamara Dean [resource booklet](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/creative-arts/7-12/visual-arts/stage-4-5/ctl-alt-shift/creativearts-visualarts-resource-ctrlaltshift-tamaradean-resourcebooklet-s5.docx) [In Our Nature](http://www.tamaradean.com.au/works/in-our-nature-2018/) series of photographs on Tamara Dean’s website[Tamara Dean – Nature](https://vimeo.com/427671221/bc92a42ecb) (00:10:05) |
| Lesson 8-10 | **Artmaking****Learning intention**Students create a composite image inspired by Tamara Dean’s ‘Escapade’ (2020), with multiple copies of the same figure interacting with the physical environment.**Lesson steps*** Review the ‘Tamara Dean – Nature’ video (00:10:05) where she discusses her process in making the work the work ‘Escapade’ (00:04:00 – 00:08:28). Some key ideas – playfulness, experimentation, selecting the right location, her conceptual link to the site (fleeing an invisible threat), ‘placing’ the figure in the landscape, the ‘locked off camera’ technique.
* Students consider a range of locations in the local (school) environment that might be effective for an artwork inspired by this process – what qualities does the site have? How do they experience and/or move through the site? How could they communicate that experience through repetition, pose, gesture, and body language?
* In their planning, students should develop a sketch of their image, with consideration given to the number and placement of repeated figures; their pose, gesture, and movement; and the ways their figures interact with the space and each other.
* The [Mise en scène: contemporary photography and film](https://sites.google.com/education.nsw.gov.au/mise-en-scne/home) resource may be helpful in guiding student planning of elements such as setting, props, costume, hair, makeup, characters, lighting, atmosphere, point of view and perspective.
* Students work in their photoshoot pairs to capture their photographs – remembering to keep their cameras fully ‘locked off’ on tripods to eliminate any unwanted movement between shots. (tip: capture a ‘key’ image of the empty background first before introducing the figures)
* Students use image editing software to combine their images.

The following workflow is recommended for Adobe Photoshop CC 2018. Students are advised to organise the set of images into a single working folder.1. In Photoshop, select file > script > load files into stack, and select their images
2. Each image will be imported as a separate layer. If students have shot a ‘key’ image to use as a background layer, they should drag this layer to the bottom of the layer stack
3. With the Photoshop file set up, now is a great time to save. In general, students should save their work frequently
4. Students begin to edit their images to create the repetition effect, starting with the top layer and moving down
5. Students use their preferred tool to isolate the figure and delete the background in each image – quick select, lasso, magnetic lasso, and Eraser are all good options
6. As a final adjustment, make a subtle change to the overall colour cast of the image by using either the photo filter or colour balance adjustment layers, and the Vibrance adjustment layer (refer to learning sequence 1)
7. Export for storage and exhibition.

Consider exhibiting these manipulated works alongside the Moran Prize works from the previous lesson – either as prints in a school gallery setting, or online as a virtual exhibition. | Formative assessment:Photoshoot sketches and planning recorded in Visual Arts Diary.Summative assessment: Completed photographic artworks. | [Tamara Dean – Nature](https://vimeo.com/427671221/bc92a42ecb) (00:10:05)[Mise en scène: contemporary photography and film](https://sites.google.com/education.nsw.gov.au/mise-en-scne/home)  |

# References

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[Photographic and Digital Media 7-10 Syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/creative-arts/music-7-10) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2004. date accessed 17/12/2020.

[Tamara Dean – Nature](https://vimeo.com/427671221/bc92a42ecb) (00:10:05) date accessed 17/12/2020.

[Q & A: Tamara Dean](http://www.capturemag.com.au/profiles/q-and-a-tamara-dean) date accessed 17/12/2020.

[Moran Contemporary Photographic Prizes](https://www.moranprizes.com.au/moran-contemporary-photographic-prizes) date accessed 17/12/2020.

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[Tamara Dean: Relationships, Nature and Ritual](https://bluethumb.com.au/blog/interviews/an-interview-with-tamara-dean/) date accessed 17/12/2020.

Adobe Photoshop User Guide: [Enhance your image with colour balance adjustments](https://helpx.adobe.com/au/photoshop/using/applying-color-balance-adjustment.html) date accessed 17/12/2020.

Adobe Photoshop User Guide: [Learn how to adjust color saturation using a Vibrance adjustment layer.](https://helpx.adobe.com/au/photoshop/using/adjust-vibrance.html) date accessed 17/12/2020.

[Tamara Dean – In Our Nature (2018)](http://www.tamaradean.com.au/works/in-our-nature-2018/) date accessed 17/12/2020.