# Conversations and appropriation in the artworld – Year 12 Visual arts case study

**Teacher resource booklet**



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## Overview

This case study focuses on an investigation of Australian artist Margaret Preston’s appropriation of Aboriginal motifs in her practice. Preston’s artmaking and critical writing are considered from modernist and contemporary perspectives, concentrating on bodies of work from two contemporary Aboriginal artists. Gordon Bennett’s ‘Home Décor’ series (1996 – 2014) and Tony Albert’s ‘Conversations with Margaret Preston’ (2020), recontextualise Preston’s works to comment on issues of identity, authenticity, and the colonial lens through which Aboriginal people have been viewed. This investigation is situated within the postmodern frame, and relationships between artists, artworks, world, and audience are examined to reveal challenges to historical narratives of art through an analysis of the intentions, choices, and actions of three artists who have used appropriation in their practice.

Throughout the case study, students are challenged to consider how the practice of appropriation can have differing impacts depending on the artist’s background, intention, and use of the source material, and how ‘conversations’ can be enacted between artists when they use appropriation to comment on other artists’ practice. Consideration is also given to how these conversations occur between artists and audiences, and the strategies used by artists to communicate a point of view. Questions are raised about the use of Aboriginal imagery in purely decorative forms by non-Aboriginal artists and designers, and how attitudes towards this use have shifted over the past century.

A range of strategies are outlined to engage students with the source material, which includes artwork images sourced from various gallery and museum websites, extracts from archival text, artist, and curator statements, including videos and critical and historical writing from newspapers and artworld publications. Students interpret and analyse this source material by completing the learning activities for each week, which have been designed to support deep engagement with the visual arts content areas of practice, the conceptual framework, and the frames.

The ‘student resource’ is intended for use as a digital workbook, with source material and scaffolded reading and writing activities. This ‘teacher resource’ provides guidance for teachers to unpack the case study content, strategies for differentiation and moderation of the activities, and sample responses that can be used to guide classroom discussions and student note-making. Finally, 6 essay questions are provided at the end of the resource to provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate evidence of their learning in a format that will assist their preparations for the HSC Visual Arts examination. These questions could be used directly in the classroom or adapted for use in a formal school-based assessment task.

### Outcomes

**Course:** HSC Visual arts

**Lesson sequence duration:** 6 weeks

**Focus content:** Practice, conceptual framework, frames

Students will develop knowledge, skills, and understanding of how they may represent an informed point of view about the visual arts in their critical and historical accounts.

In the HSC Visual Arts course, the content of practice, the conceptual framework, and frames should be assembled in interpretative ways with a view to it being understood by students as a network of relations.

Scaffolds for [practice](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#Practice6:~:text=in%20the%20artworld.-,Practice%20in%20artmaking%2C%20art%20history%20and%20art%20criticism%20scaffold,-Students%20learn%20about), [the conceptual framework](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#Practice6:~:text=and%20so%20on.-,The%20conceptual%20framework%20scaffold,-The%20conceptual%20framework), and [the frames](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#Practice6:~:text=resource%20google%2Dsite-,The%20frames%20scaffold,-As%20students%27%20progress) are referred to throughout the case study. Teachers should model the use of these scaffolds as tools to develop and apply student understanding of syllabus content.

**Students will:**

* explore the practice of 3 significant Australian artists – Tony Albert, Gordon Bennett, and Margaret Preston – and consider the legacy and impact of the use of Aboriginal artworks, artefacts, and designs by non-Aboriginal artists and designers throughout the 20th century
* conduct research to identify and account for recurring images and motifs in the works of these artists and designers, stemming from Margaret Preston’s practice of appropriating and incorporating Aboriginal designs into her own artmaking practice
* analyse and interpret a broad range of source material, including artworks, archival texts, journals, art gallery and museum websites and publications, newspaper articles, and video material
* consider the perspectives of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practitioners, including artists, designers, art critics and historians, curators, anthropologists, and lawyers
* construct a critical account of the ‘conversations’ that have occurred between Tony Albert, Gordon Bennett, and Margaret Preston through the use of appropriation in their artmaking.

#### Art Criticism and Art History Outcomes

Table 1 – Syllabus outcomes

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Content | A student: |
| Practice | H7: applies their understanding of practice in art criticism and art history |
| Conceptual framework | H8: applies their understanding of the relationships among the artist, artwork, world, and audience |
| Frames | H9: demonstrates an understanding of how the frames provide for different orientations to critical and historical investigations of art |
| Representation | H10: constructs a body of significant art histories, critical narrative, and other documentary accounts of representation in the visual arts. |

Outcomes referred to in this document are from [Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/stage-6-creative-arts/visual-arts-syllabus) © 2016 NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales.

### Learning intentions

By completing this case study, students will:

* construct an account through a critical and historical investigation that explains the intentions, choices, and actions of artists
* investigate points of view made in critical and historical writing about artists, artworks or styles, audience responses, and changing interpretations of the world
* learn how art criticism and art history provide for the exchange of opinions and viewpoints that are informed by a knowledge of practice
* use the postmodern frame to view artworld relationships as complex reconfigurations, replications, contradictions, and challenges to historical and current narratives of art and representations of the world
* use the cultural frame to interpret particular social, economic, and political conditions of the world as explanatory contexts for understanding art
* use the structural frame to consider how artists work with conventions of representation to imbue materials, techniques, and imagery with communicative value.

### Key competencies

**Collecting, analysing, and organising information**

Students will collect information from a broad range of sources, including by conducting guided research. They will then organise and analyse this information using the provided scaffolds.

**Communicating ideas and information**

Students will communicate their knowledge and understanding of content through short and extended writing activities throughout the duration of the case study.

**Using technology**

Students use a range of online platforms to conduct research, including archival material, online publications, virtual exhibitions, website text, images, video, and audio material.

### Key questions

As they progress through this case study, students will consider the questions below.

* What is revealed about the artmaking intentions, choices, and actions of the 3 focus artists?
* How are ‘appropriation’ and ‘cultural appropriation’ considered differently?
* How have values and attitudes about Aboriginal art varied between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and how has this changed over time?

### Teacher notes

* In the HSC Visual arts course, a minimum of 5 case studies of between 4-10 hours should be completed. This case study is intended to be adapted to suit the individual class and school context, and teachers should select activities to meet their requirements.
* The teacher might choose to set some activities as pre-learning or homework.
* The teacher might choose to streamline or adapt some activities (like the artwork scavenger hunts) by providing the artwork images, definitions and/or quotes directly to students.
* The scaffolds for [practice](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#Practice6:~:text=in%20the%20artworld.-,Practice%20in%20artmaking%2C%20art%20history%20and%20art%20criticism%20scaffold,-Students%20learn%20about), [the conceptual framework](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#Practice6:~:text=and%20so%20on.-,The%20conceptual%20framework%20scaffold,-The%20conceptual%20framework), or [the frames](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#Practice6:~:text=resource%20google%2Dsite-,The%20frames%20scaffold,-As%20students%27%20progress) are utilised throughout the case study, and feature guiding questions to support student understanding in each content area. It is recommended that copies of each scaffold be provided to students.
* In some reading activities students are directed to highlight or code text to identify and categorise references to artist, artwork, world, and audience. This ‘markup’ strategy could also be applied to other readings such as the introductory text for each week, as well as articles and other text linked in the case study.
* Writing activities should be adapted to the class context. These could be completed individually or assigned to groups with students sharing their responses among the class. Writing activities could be re-framed as prompts for classroom discussions, with opportunities for student note making.
* The student resource has been designed for students to work in directly, using their own digital copy and completing the activities using the provided tables and text boxes. Completed activities could be submitted or shared online for teacher review.
* The student resource could be shared as a digital document for collaborative use between students. The teacher could collate a ‘master copy’ featuring teacher modelled responses and/or a selection of student responses from the class.
* Example responses provided in the teacher resource could be used by the teacher as prompts to facilitate discussions, as suggestions to guide student understanding, and to provide additional depth and detail to the case study content.

### Differentiation

A range of activities are provided which vary in complexity. The teacher should make decisions as to how to adapt activities to the class context or to provide differentiation to cater to individual student needs.

For students that require support adjustments, the teacher might choose for them to focus on simpler tasks involving finding images and definitions of terms. Interpretative and analytical activities could be reduced in length to require only one example instead of several, or where multiple sources are provided, the teacher could determine which source is to be used.

For activities where students are directed to use the scaffolds for [practice](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#Practice6:~:text=in%20the%20artworld.-,Practice%20in%20artmaking%2C%20art%20history%20and%20art%20criticism%20scaffold,-Students%20learn%20about), [the conceptual framework](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#Practice6:~:text=and%20so%20on.-,The%20conceptual%20framework%20scaffold,-The%20conceptual%20framework), or [the frames](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#Practice6:~:text=resource%20google%2Dsite-,The%20frames%20scaffold,-As%20students%27%20progress), the teacher could identify specific questions to be completed as a support or extension adjustment. Further extension adjustments could involve specifying a length for short answer responses throughout the resource, or having students complete more than one essay response in the final activity.

Teachers should refer to the [Differentiation adjustment tool](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/high-potential-and-gifted-education/supporting-educators/implement/differentiation-adjustment-strategies) for further guidance. Additional resources including scaffolds and learning tools can be accessed via the [Digital Learning Selector](https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/digital-learning-selector/).

## Case study learning activities

### Week 1 – Shadow cast over a painter’s legacy

**Learning intention**

H7, H8, H9, H10

Students identify and define key art terms, and research focus artworks from Tony Albert, Gordon Bennett, and Margaret Preston. They recognise the changing perceptions of Margaret Preston’s artworks and practice and analyse the perspectives of a range of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers.

Teachers should use these introductory activities to assess student’s prior knowledge of issues about Aboriginal art, appropriation, and postmodernism. Where necessary, further definitions could be added to the glossary activities to clarify student understanding.

#### Learning activities

The following learning activities relate to the Week 1 focus area.

##### Introduction

Students read the introductory text about the 3 focus artists.

Teacher shows Tony Albert’s video discussing the exhibition [Conversations with Margaret Preston (2:40)](https://vimeo.com/512719450).

A classroom discussion might follow, using prompting questions like:

* What issues do you think the artist is asking audiences to consider?
* What do you already know about this issue? What can you relate it to?
* Why might he have chosen the imagery of shining a light in a dark room?
* Is his opinion of Margaret Preston obvious or more subtle? Give reasons for your thinking.

##### Defining terms

This is a short activity to define some key terms relevant to the unit. Definitions for ‘appropriation’ and ‘cultural appropriation’ are provided – the teacher could discuss the difference with the class or have them suggest examples.

Students find definitions for ‘modernism’ ‘postmodernism’ and ‘postcolonial art.’ The Tate’s extensive [Art Terms glossary](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms) is recommended for this activity, and each entry also includes discussion, artwork examples, and related terms. An example of a completed answer table is provided below.

Table 2 – Example completed definition table

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Art term | Definition |
| Modernism | Modernism refers to a global movement in society and culture that from the early decades of the twentieth century sought a new alignment with the experience and values of modern industrial life. Building on late nineteenth-century precedents, artists around the world used new imagery, materials, and techniques to create artworks that they felt better reflected the realities and hopes of modern societies.[Modernism – Art Term | Tate](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/modernism) |
| Postmodernism | Postmodernism can be seen as a reaction against the ideas and values of modernism, as well as a description of the period that followed modernism's dominance in cultural theory and practice in the early and middle decades of the twentieth century. The term is associated with scepticism, irony, and philosophical critiques of the concepts of universal truths and objective reality.[Postmodernism – Art Term | Tate](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/postmodernism) |
| Postcolonial art | Postcolonial art refers to art produced in response to the aftermath of colonial rule, frequently addressing issues of national and cultural identity, race, and ethnicity. Postcolonial theory, which underpins postcolonial art, does not simply relate to the time after which a nation gains independence from its colonial ruler. It analyses and responds to the cultural legacies of colonialism and the human consequences of controlling a country in order to exploit the native people and their land.[Postcolonial art – Art Term | Tate](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/postcolonial-art) |

##### Scavenger hunt

Students follow the directions to collect artwork images by Tony Albert, Gordon Bennett, and Margaret Preston, matching pairs of original and appropriated artworks.

Students may need to use a screen capture tool such as ‘Snip & Sketch’ to record images in their case study document.

The linked sources for Tony Albert and Gordon Bennett’s artworks are art institution websites and include citations. The teacher might choose to play the linked audio curator statement for [Gordon Bennett – Home Décor (after M. Preston) – The National (3:20)](https://www.the-national.com.au/artists/gordon-bennett/home-d%C3%A9cor-after-m-preston/) to contextualise his work.

In the Gordon Bennett activity, the linked source [Margaret Preston – ‘The Indigenous Art of Australia’ – *Art in Australia*](https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-352254395/view?partId=nla.obj-352331229#page/n41/mode/1up) is an archival scan hosted on Trove (pages 42 to 55). The teacher and students should be aware that this source contains language and descriptions that may be considered offensive towards Aboriginal people and other minority groups.

In the Tony Albert activity, the Margaret Preston works referenced are:

* [*Christmas bells*, 1925](https://searchthecollection.nga.gov.au/object/78464)
* [*Australian legend, number 3: The kangaroo hunt*, 1957](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/207.1977/)
* [*The expulsion*, 1952](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/DA64.1967/)

##### Changing perspectives

Students read the article [Shadow cast over a painter's legacy](https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/shadow-cast-over-a-painters-legacy-20050725-gdlquq.html) and complete the glossary, quote bank and summary question.

When searching for definitions, students should be encouraged to select results that clarify their understanding of the term as it relates to visual arts. Examples of a completed quote bank activity are provided below.

Table 3 – Example completed Aboriginal perspectives quote bank activity

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Author | Background/role | Quotes | Impact/explanation |
| Hetti Perkins | Arrente/ Kalkadoon.Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art at AGNSW | 'The narrative [in Preston's work] isn't clear for an indigenous person. It's like speaking in a French accent without speaking French. The accent in there, the intonation is there, but the meaning is not.’Preston's attempts to engage with indigenous art, Perkins believes, were prescient and beautiful from a non-indigenous point of view. ‘But I think there's still a way to go,’ Perkins says. ‘It's yet to be done successfully by a non-indigenous artist.’ | She is suggesting that Margaret Preston did not understand the narrative, stories, context, or importance of the art that she took images from.Margaret Preston’s interest in Aboriginal art was ahead of its time but did not take Aboriginal peoples’ perspectives into account. |
| Gary Lee | Larrakia.Artist and curator | ‘What a lot of Aboriginal curators and artists don't particularly like about Preston is the way she's held up as somebody who promoted Aboriginal art. They talked about her promoting Aboriginal art imagery almost like she promoted Aboriginal art itself.’ | It's important to consider the difference between promoting Aboriginal imagery on a superficial level, and actually engaging with Aboriginal peoples and understanding the cultural significance of traditional artmaking practices. |
| Djon Mundine | Bundjalung.Curator | ‘There's some indigenous people who are practising in their religion, and the imagery is very sacred. Using them in that way shows a total disrespect for any knowledge of what those images actually mean. It's showing an interest but an ignorance.’‘The works present a veneer of Aboriginality ... the veneer of someone who is still like a tourist in their own country.’ | The artefacts used in Preston’s designs have important cultural meanings and are used in religious and spiritual practices. Taking those images for art or design is disrespectful and ignores that importance.The works are superficial and don’t represent an understanding of the significance of artefacts and cultural designs for Aboriginal people. |

Table 4 – Example completed non-Aboriginal perspectives from quote bank activity

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Author | Role/ background | Quotes | Impact/explanation |
| Sydney Morning Herald | Major daily newspaper | ‘Mainstream art history taught in the years after Preston's death in 1963 cast her as a passionate champion of Australian nationalism and indigenous art. Through a modern political lens, Preston can also be seen as a white artist who took images from a culture already abused and exploited, without any cultural, social, or political understanding of the meaning of these images, nor of the people from whom she was borrowing.’ | The author is explaining that social attitudes towards Aboriginal people and Aboriginal art have changed to recognise the conditions Aboriginal people faced, and the issues around non-Aboriginal people copying Aboriginal art without permission from the creators or understanding its importance to them. |
| Margaret Preston | Artist | ‘The totemic part of [Aboriginal] work is another branch of study which does not come into the latitude of plastic art, any more than the religious views of the van Eycks in their magnificent, aesthetic and cultural art.’‘Mythology and religious symbolism do not matter to the artist, only to the anthropologist,’ wrote Preston in 1930. | These quotes from Margaret Preston communicate her view that artists should use Aboriginal designs in their own art without considering about the cultural and spiritual meaning to the original creators. |
| Deborah Edwards | Senior curator of Australian art, AGNSW. Curator of ‘Margaret Preston: Art and Life’ exhibition. | ‘Western artists have had a long tradition of borrowing from other cultures,’ Edwards says. ‘She did so with an absolute respect for the culture.’ | Deborah Edwards is referring to the history of European artists using ideas and imagery from other cultures and suggests that Margaret Preston’s use of Aboriginal imagery was respectful of culture. |

Students complete the summary question activity, writing a paragraph that uses the postmodern frame to explain the artworld ideas and practices that are challenged in the article.

This activity could be completed individually or modelled/scaffolded by the teacher. An example of a completed response is provided below.

Margaret Preston was a well-known Australian artist. From the 1920s onwards, she took motifs or imagery from Aboriginal art to use in her own artworks. Although this practice of appropriation from other cultures was considered reasonable and used by many Western (European) artists in the modernist period, it is not considered appropriate today. For some Aboriginal people, these types of images are considered sacred and have religious meaning, however Margaret Preston wrote in 1930 that ‘mythology and religious symbolism do not matter to the artist, only to the anthropologist’. Aboriginal curator Djon Mundine says that ‘using them in that way shows a total disrespect for any knowledge of what those images actually mean.’ This kind of disrespect can be thought of as a ‘shadow’ over Margaret Preston’s legacy, as social attitudes and understanding of Aboriginal art have changed since her time.

### Week 2 – Margaret Preston

**Learning intention**

H7, H8, H9, H10

Students conduct research and analysis into Margaret Preston’s 1925 essay [‘The Indigenous Art of Australia’](https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-352254395/view?partId=nla.obj-352331229#page/n41/mode/1up) (images and article from pages 42 to 55). Students consider the social context of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the 1920s. They collect quotes from Margaret Prestons’s article that reveal her intentions, beliefs, and actions, and identify aspects of her writing that might be considered out-dated or offensive by today’s standards. They compare the traditional use of the designs and artefacts with the design applications suggested by Margaret Preston.

Students then complete a summary activity, using the [conceptual framework](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=and%20so%20on.-,The%20conceptual%20framework%20scaffold,-The%20conceptual%20framework) and [frames](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=resource%20google%2Dsite-,The%20frames%20scaffold,-As%20students%27%20progress) scaffolds to record some notes about Margaret Preston.

As an extension activity, students research [Margaret Preston artworks](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/artists/preston-margaret/) from the Art Gallery of NSW collection and identify examples of her use of Aboriginal motifs in her artmaking practice.

#### Learning activities

The following learning activities relate to the Week 2 focus area.

##### Introduction

Students read and interpret the text and quote, which give context to Margaret Preston’s artmaking and writing.

This material could be highlighted or coded for references to artist, artwork, world, and audience for students to refer to in the ‘summarising’ activity.

##### Australia in the 1920s

In this brief activity, students refer to two short web sources, [Decade Overview 1920s – Decade Summary [PDF 37.05KB]](https://myplace.edu.au/assets/decade/1920/overview.pdf) and [Decafe Overview 1920s – Indigenous Australians [PDF 37.05KB]](https://myplace.edu.au/assets/decade/1920/overview.pdf), to give context for living standards for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia in the 1920s. An example of a completed answer table is provided below.

Table 5 – Example completed ‘Australia in the 1920s' answer table

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Aboriginal people | Non-Aboriginal people |
| Aboriginal soldiers weren’t eligible for any programs or benefits, or medical care | After WW1 there were higher levels of prosperity, especially for returning soldiers who were given loans to build houses. |
| Government assimilation policies to control all aspects of Aboriginal people’s lives, including removing children from their families and moving Aboriginal people onto missions/reserves. | People were buying cars and radios and going to the cinema – people had money to access these new inventions. |
| Conflict and violence between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, including the Coniston massacre (1926). | There was greater freedom for women to act independently and have access to employment and education. |

##### Article review

Teachers and students should be aware that this source contains language and descriptions that may be considered offensive towards Aboriginal people and other minority groups.

Students read the provided quotes from Margaret Preston’s 1925 essay [‘The Indigenous Art of Australia’](https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-352254395/view?partId=nla.obj-352331531#page/n43/mode/1up) and interpret and analyse aspects of her practice – her intentions, beliefs, and actions.

Use of the [practice scaffold](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=in%20the%20artworld.-,Practice%20in%20artmaking%2C%20art%20history%20and%20art%20criticism%20scaffold,-Students%20learn%20about) is recommended for this activity. An example of a completed answer table is provided below.

Table 6 – Example completed article review answer table

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Quote | Intention, belief, action |
| In wishing to rid myself of the mannerisms of a country other than my own I have gone to the art of a people who had never seen or known anything different from themselves, and were accustomed always to use the same symbols to express themselves.These are the Australian aboriginals, and it is only from the art of such people in any land that a national art can spring. | Preston states her intention here to develop a ‘national art’ – a style unique to Australia and not influenced by art from other countries. She believes that art made by Aboriginal people is the best inspiration for this. |
| Would France be now at the head of all nations in art if her artists and craftsmen had not given her fresh stimulus from time to time by benefiting from the art of her native colonies, and not only her own colonies, but by borrowing freely from the colonies of other countries? | France was seen as the center of the art world at the time. Preston refers to the practice of artists working in France who drew inspiration from artworks and artefacts from French colonies – Picasso and Gauguin are examples of this. |
| The Taphoglyphs\* are particularly good and there are many of these in the Museum, one of which is illustrated in this article. I have designed from it for a material that needs an all-over pattern: for instance, people who sleep out of doors need their beds covered, and white coverlets are both ugly and unpractical.\*Taphoglyph: A carved tree indicating a grave. | This is one of many examples Preston gives of ways to apply Aboriginal designs to object design – in this case for a blanket. The article states in a footnote that the design came from a carved tree used to indicate a grave – the significance of this is not considered by Preston. |
| One thing I have not pointed out in these aboriginal designs is their simple colours. As you will see they used only those provided directly by nature: red and yellow ochre and a burnt stick for outlining or blackening masses. And surely when you see the results you will admit that some of them are delightful, restful and simple. | Preston discusses Aboriginal use of charcoal and ochre colours as part of her suggestions for artists and designer – again referring only to the aesthetics and decorative value and not to any cultural practices that use ochre. |

##### Critical reflection

This activity should be treated sensitively and is intended to provide context to Preston’s writing, and to provide examples of how understanding and attitudes towards Aboriginal people and culture have change over the last 100 years.

Students collect some examples of Preston’s use of language that would be considered out-dated or offensive today.

An example of a completed response is provided below.

‘aboriginal,’ ‘indigenous’ – these words are now capitalised as a sign of respect.

‘primitive,’ ‘native’ – words that would now be considered offensive and not used to describe Aboriginal people today.

Quotes that describe Aboriginal people as ‘other’ or ‘lesser’:

‘Therefore I feel no loss of dignity in studying and applying myself to the art of the aboriginals of Australia.’ ‘It will be much easier for the highly intelligent mind to do this than the mind that never thinks for itself but depends on custom and tradition.’ ‘the aboriginal designs are not without human interest.’

Students consider the contrast between the original purpose of the Aboriginal designs reproduced in the article, and Margaret Preston’s suggested application for them.

The teacher might facilitate a discussion about this contrast between cultural and ceremonial use and use for home decoration, and how this appropriation of sacred and ceremonial artefacts is offensive to Aboriginal communities. An example of a completed answer table is provided below.

Table 7 – Example completed critical reflection answer table

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Aboriginal nation of origin intention | Margaret Preston design intention |
| Taphoglyph – a carved tree trunk used to indicate graves and other significant ceremony sites. | ‘Suitable for a mat and may be worked in coloured raffia or wool’ |
| Ceremonial frontlet, South Alligator River – something to be worn during a ceremony. | ‘A simple, self-contained design for a cushion’ |
| Design from a dancing board – possibly used for ceremonies. | ‘This design is most suitable for continuation as a border for curtains, mats etc.’ |
| Design adapted from a shield, Cairns North Queensland – another shield design that may have been used in ceremony or conflict. | ‘…a section of a continuous design for borders to hanging shades, curtains, cushions, etc.’ |

##### Summarising

Students use the [conceptual framework](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=and%20so%20on.-,The%20conceptual%20framework%20scaffold,-The%20conceptual%20framework) scaffold and questions from the [cultural frame](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=resource%20google%2Dsite-,The%20frames%20scaffold,-As%20students%27%20progress) found in the frames scaffold to record some notes about Margaret Preston.

This summarising activity is repeated for Gordon Bennett and Tony Albert. The teacher might use this first activity to model organising notes into categories using the prompting questions from the scaffolds.

This activity could be configured as groupwork, with students assigned different areas of content to focus on and then sharing their notes with the class.

These notes could be added to throughout the case study, as further examples of Margaret Preston’s artworks are shown. Sample responses are provided below.

Table 8 – Example summarising activity responses

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Content area | Notes |
| Artwork | Margaret Preston’s illustrations of home décor designs that used Aboriginal motifs.The designs are simplified, using only a few colours and geometric shapes.Each image has a caption that describes where the design came from and what it might be used for, for example ‘Design from a Golmary shield, North Queensland, which in itself is not adaptable for continuation or repetition. May be applied in mats, cushions, or splash mats.’ There isn’t much explanation of Aboriginal people’s use for these designs or their significance.Preston has used these images to represent her idea that Australian artists and designers should use Aboriginal designs in their work. |
| Artist | Margaret Preston was a successful Australian artist in the modernist period.She was influenced by European modernists like Gauguin and Picasso, especially their use of Indigenous designs in their artmaking.In her writing, she persuades Australian artists and designers to also use Aboriginal designs in their artmaking, in order to develop a distinct Australian style.She has used Aboriginal designs in new ways and was one of the first Australian artists to do this. She has represented her practice by publishing her article and artworks in the Art in Australia journal. |
| Audience | When writing for Art in Australia, Margaret Preston’s audience was other Australians interested in the artworld, which may have included other practicing artists, designers, writers, and curators, as well as amateur artists and designers and others with an interest in Australian art.According to ‘mainstream art history,’ Margaret Preston was a ‘passionate champion of Australian nationalism and indigenous art’.Later audiences, especially Aboriginal curators, have criticised Preston’s use of Aboriginal motifs in her artworks.Other writers defend this practice as being one of many examples of modernist artists appropriating Indigenous imagery in their artmaking. |
| World | Margaret Preston was active as an artist in Australia from the 1920s to 1960s – the modernist period.The 1920s were a period of economic prosperity for many non-Aboriginal Australians, with returning soldiers given land grants and women accessing education and entering the workforce – these new freedoms for women would have made it easier for Margaret Preston to start a career as an artist.Aboriginal people were experiencing discrimination through government policies like child removal, assimilation, and removing Aboriginal people from their homelands onto missions and reserves, with very few rights and freedoms. |
| Cultural frame | Margaret Preston has been influenced by European modernists, and Australian Aboriginal art. She was interested in ideas about modernism like developing new art styles, a ‘national identity’ or an art style that represented Australia, and the idea of ‘the world stage’ – Australian art being compared with and seen as equal to international art.Her artworks and writing about Aboriginal art reveal that Australian attitudes towards Aboriginal people at the time were negative and dismissive. She was very interested in Aboriginal art but only for its decorative aspects. She didn’t think the original cultural or spiritual value of Aboriginal art mattered. |

##### Extension – Further research

This is a simple extension activity where students investigate the [Art Gallery of NSW’s collection of Margaret Preston artworks](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/artists/preston-margaret/), and identify examples where she has applied Aboriginal designs or themes.

This might include representations of Aboriginal people, use of ochre colours in a painting, and geometric designs appropriated from Aboriginal artefacts.

Some specific examples could be:

* [*I lived at Berowra*, 1941 by Margaret Preston: | Art Gallery of NSW](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/7177/)
* [*Fish*, 1946 by Margaret Preston: | Art Gallery of NSW](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/213.1977/)
* [*Native flowers of Australia*, 1946 by Margaret Preston: | Art Gallery of NSW](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/181.2002/)
* [*The expulsion*, 1952 by Margaret Preston: | Art Gallery of NSW](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/DA64.1967/)
* [*Fish and blackboys*, 1955 by Margaret Preston: | Art Gallery of NSW](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/9138/)
* [*Australian legend, number 1: The superimposed feet*, circa 1957 by Margaret Preston: | Art Gallery of NSW](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/DA65.1967/)
* [A*ustralian legend, number 2: The terrible story*, circa 1957 by Margaret Preston: | Art Gallery of NSW](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/DA61.1967/)
* [*Australian legend, number 3: The kangaroo hunt*, circa 1957 by Margaret Preston: | Art Gallery of NSW](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/207.1977/)
* [*Australian legend, number 4: Kangaroo dance and pointing the bone*, circa 1957 by Margaret Preston: | Art Gallery of NSW](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/DA7.1959/)
* [*Australian legend, number 5: End of the love story, Curing and flight of love*, circa 1957 by Margaret Preston: | Art Gallery of NSW](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/DA62.1967/)
* [*Aboriginal glyph*, circa 1958 by Margaret Preston: | Art Gallery of NSW](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/DA2.1960/)

### Week 3 – ‘Aboriginalia’, Australian design history, and copyright law

**Learning intention**

H7, H8, H9, H10

Students investigate Tony Albert’s use of the term ‘Aboriginalia’ to refer to home décor objects which ‘include naïve images of Australian Aboriginal people and their culture.’

Students trace the emerging use and popularity of Aboriginal motifs for decoration and design works in the 1930s to 1960s, in particular the recurrence of specific designs published in the popular anthropological text [*Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art*](http://search.slv.vic.gov.au/permalink/f/1o9hq1f/SLV_VOYAGER1238182). These designs form the basis of the found objects used in the Tony Albert artworks in this case study.

Students then consider [*Milpurrurru v Indofurn Pty Ltd*](https://jade.io/article/195477), otherwise known as The carpets case, a landmark legal decision in Australian copyright law. A group of Aboriginal artists were awarded significant damages after a copyright claim was raised against an Australian company that had appropriated designs without consultation or permission from the artists. The designs were used to make decorative carpets which were manufactured in Vietnam and then imported into Australia. Students consider Australian legal and Aboriginal cultural perspectives, as well as the changed value or meaning when a sacred design is reproduced as a carpet.

#### Learning activities

The following learning activities relate to the Week 3 focus area.

##### Tony Albert on ‘Aboriginalia’

Two short text extracts and a video are provided to give Tony Albert’s perspective on the found objects he uses in his artmaking practice, and how his understanding of these objects has changed over time. [Why does Tony Albert collect Aboriginalia? (3:13)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPbd808PUiU) gives insight into Tony Albert’s artmaking practice where he collects these objects and incorporates them into his text-based installation works. He discusses the work Sorry (2008), which is referred to again later in the case study.

Students give a brief account of how Tony Albert’s perspective on ‘Aboriginalia’ has changed. An example of a completed answer is provided below.

Tony Albert describes ‘Aboriginalia’ as ‘objects such as ash trays, drink coasters, velvet paintings, tea-towels and playing cards which include naïve images of Australian Aboriginal people and their culture.’ As a child, he thought that these images represented significant Aboriginal people and were a source of pride, but he has come to understand the more complex connotations of objects used for decoration and not made by Aboriginal people. He explains that they reinforce the idea of Aboriginal people as not being seen as part of Australian society, but being owned by it, and used to sell the idea of ‘Australia.’ He uses his collection of objects to reclaim and ‘revoice’ the objects.

##### *Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art*

This activity gives some historical context to the phenomenon of ‘Aboriginalia.’

Students read the description and quote from the book [*Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art*](http://search.slv.vic.gov.au/permalink/f/1o9hq1f/SLV_VOYAGER1238182).

It is not recommended that students access the source directly as it contains some sensitive imagery.

Students complete a matching activity, viewing selected examples of art and design works from the 1940s and 1950s and matching them to the provided images of artefacts taken from [*Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art*](http://search.slv.vic.gov.au/permalink/f/1o9hq1f/SLV_VOYAGER1238182). The Windows ‘Snip & Sketch’ tool is recommended to screenshot and crop images for use in this activity.

This is intended as a quick activity, with students only directed to find two of the five examples. Students might share their answers with peers to complete a response table.

##### Aboriginal artists and copyright law

Students read the selected source material about The carpets case and complete the summary questions. Students ‘code’ the text as they read it, using different colours to highlight references to artist, artwork, world, and audience.

Where more than one agency is identified, students could use the font colour and text highlighter tools in Microsoft Word to dual code the selected text or add terms in parentheses such as (artwork) or (artist – world).

Students use the information in the two sources to compare how ownership and use of culturally significant images in Aboriginal artworks is considered differently in Australian copyright law and traditional Aboriginal law. An example of a completed answer table is provided below.

Table 9 – Example completed comparative ownership answer table

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Australian copyright law | Traditional Aboriginal law |
| The individual artist owns the copyright to their artwork.Reproductions of artworks require the permission of the artist. | The images and stories are owned by the landowner groups and may represent secret knowledge only recognised by initiated people.Artists have the right to use sacred images in their own work if they are part of the group that owns that image/story.The artist is held responsible for any unauthorised use of sacred images.Banduk Marika says she holds the image in trust for all other Yolgnu people who also have ownership. |

Students refer to [Art and Indigenous rights – National Museum of Australia](https://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/yalangbara/art-indigenous-rights) for further information and images of Banduk Marika’s artwork and the counterfeit carpet.

Students make some notes, referring to the [conceptual framework](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=and%20so%20on.-,The%20conceptual%20framework%20scaffold,-The%20conceptual%20framework). An example of a completed answer table is provided below.

Table 10 – Example completed 'Carpets Case' answer table

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Agency of the artworld | ‘Djanda and the Sacred Waterhole’ | Counterfeit carpet |
| Artist | Banduk Marika, Yolgnu people. | Indofurn Ltd. |
| Artwork | 1984 linocut on paper, showing two lizard forms and a complex patterned background. | Carpet, made in Vietnam. A close copy of Banduk Marika’s artwork. |
| Audience | Made to educate art gallery audiences about Aboriginal art and culture.  | Made for interior decoration. |
| World | Artwork shows a sacred story from the artist’s ancestral lands at Yelangbara. | No reference to the artist or the cultural significance of the artwork. |

Students write a brief response that explains why the use of a sacred design on a carpet could be considered especially inappropriate. This question could also be configured as a prompt for a class discussion. An example of a completed response is provided below.

Banduk Marika’s original artwork ‘Djanda and the Sacred Waterhole’ represents a creation story important to Yolgnu people, in particular the artist’s family who are the traditional owners of the sites represented in the story. The images and knowledge in the artwork have great cultural value and been represented carefully and sensitively by the artist to educate art audiences about Aboriginal culture. Permission would never have been given to reproduce these images on design objects like carpets because it would not be culturally appropriate to do so. The use of a design like this on a carpet, which might be walked on or have objects placed on it, is particularly disrespectful to the artist and her community, and reveals a lack of understanding of the significance of art in Aboriginal culture.

##### Extension – Changing practices

These two activities are designed to give some context to current efforts to address issues around authenticity and design theft, such as those raised in The carpets case.

**ICIP (Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property)**

Students read [What is Indigenous cultural intellectual property and copyright and how can I respect it? – ABC News](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-11/what-is-indigenous-cultural-intellectual-property-and-copyright/12150308) and identify what types of cultural material is included in ICIP. An example of a completed response is provided below.

ICIP (Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property) refers to ‘traditional knowledge, cultural practices, spiritual knowledge, ancestral material and languages.’ It may specifically refer to literary, performing, and artistic works, languages, spiritual knowledge, tangible, and intangible cultural property, Indigenous ancestral remains and genetic material, cultural environmental resources, sites of Indigenous heritage, and documentation of Indigenous heritage.

Students then investigate the ‘gaps in the law’ and identify aspects of ICIP that are not protected by copyright law in Australia, referring to the ABS article and the [ICIP information sheet](https://www.artslaw.com.au/information-sheet/indigenous-cultural-and-intellectual-property-icip-aitb/) from the Arts Law Centre of Australia. An example of a completed response is provided below.

Copyright law does not cover all types of ICIP, and it is difficult to protect content that is in the public domain like images of ancient rock art. Australian law does not protect things like the story behind a painting, particular mark making techniques like cross hatching or dot painting, traditional languages, dance of music performances that have not been recorded or written down, and some types of traditional knowledge.

**Indigenous Art Code**

Students read the [How to buy ethically](https://indigenousartcode.org/how-to-buy-ethically/) guide to learn more about the Indigenous Art Code (IAC), which promotes ethical trading in Indigenous art.

Students use the suggestions from the guide to research an example of an artwork sourced from a gallery, dealer, or art centre that is a member of the IAC, and an example of a design object produced by an Aboriginal-owned business.

### Week 4 – Gordon Bennett

**Learning intention**

H7, H8, H9, H10

Students learn about Gordon Bennett, a significant postmodern artist who drew on his Aboriginal and Scottish-English heritage to make complex comments on race and identity in Australia. Students analyse works from two of Gordon Bennett’s series where he uses appropriation as a technique to interrogate and criticise Margaret Preston’s use of Aboriginal source material in her work.

Students review and summarise a selection of quotes from Gordon Bennett to develop their understanding of his artmaking, focusing on intention and conceptual practice.

Students research a selection of Gordon Bennett’s artworks made under the pseudonym ‘John Citizen’ ([*Interiors*](https://suttongallery.com.au/exhibitions/gordon-bennett-retro-home-decor-aboriginal-art-john-citizen-interiors/), 2009), which use designs adapted from Margaret Preston’s representations of Aboriginal people in her 1957 [*Australian Legend* series](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/search/?q=Margaret+Preston+Australian+Legend). Students analyse how Bennett’s appropriation and transformation of Preston’s artwork comments on the legacy of her directive to artists and designers to use Aboriginal designs and motifs in their art and design practices.

Students return to the artworks from Gordon Bennett’s 2012 to 2013 [*Home décor (after M Preston)*](https://www.the-national.com.au/artists/gordon-bennett/home-d%C3%A9cor-after-m-preston/) series that they identified in the [Week 1 scavenger hunt activity](#_Scavenger_hunt). Students select one pair of Bennett/Preston artworks to discuss in detail, with reference to exhibition and curator text from 2 different exhibitions.

Students then complete a summary activity, using the [conceptual framework](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=and%20so%20on.-,The%20conceptual%20framework%20scaffold,-The%20conceptual%20framework) and [frames](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=resource%20google%2Dsite-,The%20frames%20scaffold,-As%20students%27%20progress) scaffolds to record some notes about Gordon Bennett.

#### Learning activities

The following learning activities relate to the Week 4 focus area.

##### Gordon Bennett: concept and intention

Students review the provided quotes from Gordon Bennett, and use the [practice scaffold](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=in%20the%20artworld.-,Practice%20in%20artmaking%2C%20art%20history%20and%20art%20criticism%20scaffold,-Students%20learn%20about) to construct an account of Bennett’s artmaking intention and conceptual practice.

Students should exchange their interpretations by sharing with a partner or the class. An example of a completed response is provided below.

Gordon Bennett talks about his background in small town and suburban Australia where he was exposed to negative and derogatory opinions about Aboriginal people. He describes his identity as shaped by colonialism, with ‘romantic illusions and factual deletions,’ referring to the way that Australian society had not recognised the ongoing impact of colonisation on Aboriginal peoples. He also expresses his discomfort at being ‘a spokesperson for anyone in particular’ or seeking publicity, suggesting that although he makes art about history and social issues, he also sees it as quite personal, describing all of his works as a kind of self-portrait that express his experience of living in Australia. The social and political concepts explored in his practice are revealed through his statements about the historical narratives of colonialism, the perception of ‘blackness,’ and his discomfort at being labelled as an ‘Urban Aboriginal’ artist which he says is a term that has racist and primitivist connotations. When he makes artworks, he uses techniques like appropriation, citation, sampling, and remixing to communicate ideas, but he isn’t necessarily thinking about audience responses when he makes works. Instead, he thinks audiences should ‘get on with exploring the possibilities for interpretation in art for themselves.’

Students are asked to speculate on why Gordon Bennett chose to appropriate works by Margaret Preston in his artmaking practice. A variety of responses might be elicited – these could be discussed with the class and a selection of ideas recorded. An example of a completed response is provided below.

Gordon Bennett describes the history of colonialism and social attitudes towards Aboriginal people as being central to his artmaking practice. Margaret Preston has been described as encouraging a kind of ‘artistic colonialism’ through her appropriation of Aboriginal art, which can be related to Gordon Bennett’s artmaking intention and conceptual practice. Gordon Bennett also uses appropriation in his artmaking practice, and he may be making an ironic statement by re-appropriating works that have already been appropriated in order to reclaim them or ask audiences to reconsider their meaning and impact.

##### John Citizen – ‘Interiors’ and ‘Aboriginal art’ series

Students complete a research and analysis activity.

**Research**

Students select an image from the [*Interiors* series](https://suttongallery.com.au/exhibitions/gordon-bennett-retro-home-decor-aboriginal-art-john-citizen-interiors/) (2009). Any of the first four images in the series with ‘Interior’ in the title are appropriate – these are the larger paintings of colourful, minimalist interiors with images of the artworks from the ‘Home Décor (Aboriginal Art)’ series as hanging on the walls of the interior scene.

Students then review works from Margaret Preston’s 1957 [*Australian Legend*](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/search/?q=Margaret+Preston+Australian+Legend) series and try to identify which of these artworks was used as source material by Gordon Bennett. If this is not immediately clear, students should be directed to [*Australian legend, number 2: The terrible story*](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/DA61.1967/) and consider the similarities between the faces of the Aboriginal figures shown, and the highly stylised faces in the John Citizen/Gordon Bennett artworks.

Students are asked to write a short explanation of this transformation. A sample response has been provided.

In the Interiors series, Gordon Bennett, working under the pseudonym ‘John Citizen,’ has appropriated and transformed parts of Margaret Preston’s artwork Australian legend number 2: the terrible story. In Preston’s woodcut print, a group of Aboriginal women in the background react with alarm to the scene unfolding in front of them. Their faces are carved simply with wide mouths and eyes. In the John Citizen artworks, Bennett has enlarged and exaggerated their facial features and painted them as abstract portraits in individual and group compositions. These compositions are used in the Home Décor (Aboriginal Art) series, and again in the Interiors series – pictures of modern, minimalist home interior settings with the stylised portraits shown hanging on the walls.

**Analysis**

Students consider the visual language of the artwork they selected from the [*Interiors* series](https://suttongallery.com.au/exhibitions/gordon-bennett-retro-home-decor-aboriginal-art-john-citizen-interiors/) (2009), and use the structural frame to explain the symbolic value or layered meaning each the can ascribe to each feature of the Gordon Bennett/John Citizen painting.

Students are recommended to refer to the [structural frame](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=resource%20google%2Dsite-,The%20frames%20scaffold,-As%20students%27%20progress) found in the frames scaffold. An example of a completed answer table has been provided.

Table 11 – Example completed analysis answer table

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Feature | Explanation |
| ‘Aboriginal art’ shown on the wall | The artworks are shown as decorative, completing the ‘home décor’ in the interior scenes shown. The artworks are highly stylised and refer to Margaret Preston’s representation of Aboriginal people in her artwork Australian legend 2: the terrible story. The design is also reminiscent of the ‘Aboriginalia’ fabric and object designs collected by Tony Albert. |
| Colours used in ‘Aboriginal art’ | The palette of black, white, yellow, and red could refer to ochre colours, as well as to Margaret Preston’s use of ochre palettes in some of her works including the ‘Australian legend’ series, and her suggestion in her writing for other artists to use these colours. |
| Furniture design | The furniture is sleek and modern – it looks like new designer furniture. |
| Other design objects | Simple decorative objects like vases, cushions, and rugs. |
| Interior design colours | Bright, Pop Art inspired colours. Bennett might also be referring to Howard Arkley’s representations of suburban houses and interiors. |

Students then write a paragraph explaining Gordon Bennett’s appropriation of Margaret Preston’s artwork in the Interiors series to challenge ideas about Aboriginal art, home décor, and Margaret Preston’s artworks. An example of a completed response is provided below.

Gordon Bennett/John Citizen’s Interiors series (2009) consists of four paintings of modern home interiors. Each room is styled with minimalist, designer furniture, with a few decorative objects like vases, rugs, and cushions. The objects, floor and walls are brightly coloured, reminiscent of Howard Arkley’s paintings of suburban homes. Bennett has included smaller versions of his paintings from the Home Décor (Aboriginal Art) series (2009), which feature exaggerated representations of Aboriginal faces painted in warm ochre yellows, reds, and whites on black backgrounds. The style and composition of these faces have been appropriated from Margaret Preston’s *Australian Legend* series – artworks that feature stylised, primitivist depictions of Aboriginal people. By including these paintings as additional decorative elements in these home interior spaces, Bennett is commenting on Preston’s appropriation of Aboriginal art and themes in her artworks, and the phenomenon of Aboriginal ‘home décor’ that Preston’s writings encouraged.

##### ‘Home Décor (after M. Preston)’

Students revisit the Gordon Bennett paintings from the Home Décor (after M. Preston) series (2012-2013), and Margaret Preston’s illustrations from [*Art in Australia*](https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-352254395/view?partId=nla.obj-352331229#page/n41/mode/1up) from the [Week 1 scavenger hunt activity](#_Scavenger_hunt).

Students select one pair of images, and respond to the following question: How do Gordon Bennett’s paintings reconfigure the source images and give them new meaning as fine art objects, rather than material for interior design?

Student responses could be configured as a paragraph, or a list of notes following a class discussion.

Gallery text and a curator statement from 2 exhibitions featuring the ‘Home Décor (after M. Preston)’ series are provided as additional source material. Further reading and an audio recording of curator Wayne Tunnicliffe discussing the series can be accessed at [The National 4: Australian Art Now](https://www.the-national.com.au/artists/gordon-bennett/home-d%C3%A9cor-after-m-preston/). Use of the [postmodern frame](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=resource%20google%2Dsite-,The%20frames%20scaffold,-As%20students%27%20progress) found in the frames scaffold is recommended. An example of a completed response is provided below.

Gordon Bennett’s Home Décor (after M. Preston) is a series of large paintings made between 2012 and 2013. They are direct appropriations of illustrations made by Margaret Preston in the 1920s and 1930s, which she in turn appropriated from Aboriginal artefacts that she viewed in museum collections. Home Décor (after M. Preston) #18, for example, refers to Preston’s 1925 illustration adapted from a ‘Golmary shield’ from North Queensland. In Preston’s notes for the design, she encourages other artists and designers to continue her practice of using Aboriginal motifs for designs for home décor objects, in this case she suggests application in ‘mats, cushions, or splash mats.’ Gordon Bennett’s appropriation critiques Preston’s use of Aboriginal designs in her ‘primitivist’ practice, and specifically challenges the application of cultural designs for use in home décor. Bennett juxtaposes his large, 182 × 152cm canvases with Preston’s small studies, and in this canvas returns the shield design to an upright position. The significant scale of the paintings, along with their display in an art gallery context, represents a reclaiming of these images, to be viewed as fine art by an Aboriginal artist, rather than merely decorative.

##### Summarising

Students use the [conceptual framework scaffold](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=and%20so%20on.-,The%20conceptual%20framework%20scaffold,-The%20conceptual%20framework) and questions from the [postmodern and structural frames](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=resource%20google%2Dsite-,The%20frames%20scaffold,-As%20students%27%20progress) found in the frames scaffold to record some notes about Gordon Bennett.

This activity could be configured as groupwork, with students assigned different areas of content to focus on and then sharing their notes with the class. Sample responses are provided below.

Table 12 – Example summarising activity responses

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Content area | Notes |
| Artwork | Many of Gordon Bennett’s artworks are large paintings that appropriate or refer to other artworks.Interiors series (2009) and Home Décor (after M. Preston) (2012 to 2013) are both series of paintings that appropriate Margaret Preston artworks that feature Aboriginal motifs or representations of Aboriginal people. Both series challenge Margaret Preston’s idea of non-Aboriginal artists and designers using Aboriginal imagery in their designs for home décor and other design objects.In Interiors this comment is made by appropriating and exaggerating primitivist depictions of Aboriginal faces from Preston’s Australian Legend series. These distorted portraits are represented as paintings within paintings, hanging on the walls of sleek, modern interiors alongside minimalist designer furniture. Bennett may also be referring to Howard Arkley’s representations of suburban Australian home interior spaces to reinforce his point that Aboriginal art continues to be used in superficial ways for home decoration.In the Home Décor (after M. Preston) series (2012 to 2013), Bennett re-appropriates images that Margaret Preston took from Aboriginal artefacts like shields. Her ‘original’ designs were published in Art in Australia in 1925 as examples Preston gave for how artists and designers should take Aboriginal designs and motifs to use in their work, including for ‘home décor’ objects like mats and rugs. Bennett transforms her small illustrations onto his large canvases, recontextualising the images as fine art objects and returning them to Aboriginal ownership within the gallery space. |
| Artist | Throughout his painting practice, Gordon Bennett (1955 – 2014) drew on his Aboriginal and English ancestry to make complex statements about race, culture, and identity.He has stated: ‘My identity was shaped by the historical narrative of colonialism with all its romantic illusions and factual deletions,’ referring to the way Aboriginal histories had been excluded from mainstream Australian history. He viewed his work as very personal, to the point of being like a self-portrait of his day-to-day experience of living in Australia.As a postmodern artist in the 1990s and 2000s, he regularly used ‘appropriation, citation, sampling and remixing’ of images from a variety of artists, including Margaret Preston, to explore the perception of ‘blackness’ in Western/Australian society.He was uncomfortable with being labelled as an ‘Urban Aboriginal artist,’ thinking the term was loaded with racist and ‘primitivist’ connotations. |
| Audience | Gordon Bennett wrote about audiences as having the responsibility for interpreting the meaning of his artworks for themselves, and that he doesn’t think about audiences until his works are finished and sent to galleries.Audiences may be prompted to reconsider pre-conceived, mainstream, or historical accounts of Australian history and identity.Audiences may need further information, especially from art history, to interpret some of Bennett’s artworks. |
| World | Challenges mainstream accounts of Australian history and identity from an Aboriginal perspective. Colonisation, race, history, and identity are major themes in Bennett’s work.He wrote ‘To be free we must be able to question the ways our own history defines us,’ referring to his practice of questioning mainstream accounts of Australian history that exclude Aboriginal perspectives.Influenced by/identity shaped by/makes works about ‘Historical narratives of colonialism with all its romantic illusions and factual deletions,’ as well as ideas ‘about Australia and Australians in the past and present and their relationships and continuities.’ |
| Postmodern frame | Frequent use of appropriation from a variety of artists including Australian modernist Margaret Preston.Challenging mainstream histories and art histories, especially Australian history. Reconsiders and questions the impact of colonialism on Aboriginal peoples.Juxtaposes ideas and images, for example, in the Interiors series, exaggerated ‘primitivist’ portraits in a charcoal and ochre palette contrast with the colourful minimalist modern furniture. In the Home Décor (after M. Preston) series he recontextualises Margaret Preston’s designs from Aboriginal source material by making them much larger and displaying them in a gallery setting. This exposes a contrast between how each artist approached the original source material. |
| Structural frame | Gordon Bennett carefully considers the symbolic meaning of the material he appropriates and what connotations or additional meanings those images have, and how those meanings are altered by his treatment of them.In the Interiors series he uses a representation of home interior settings that connote wealth and taste – modern furniture, minimalist design, block colour. This contrasts with paintings shown on the walls of these interiors – copies of Bennett’s Aboriginal Art series, exhibited alongside Interiors – which use a charcoal and ochre palette and are distorted, exaggerated portraits of Aboriginal faces appropriated from Margaret Preston’s primitivist depictions of Aboriginal people in the Australian Legend series. Bennett’s exaggeration of this imagery could refer to other primitivist depictions of Aboriginal people in fabric and object design or refer to ‘blackface’ characters.In the Home Décor (after M. Preston) series, Bennett’s artworks have qualities that place them within a fine art context, removed from Preston’s use of the same images as illustrations for design application. The large size of Bennett’s paintings, use of fine art materials, visible brush marks and underpainting, and display in art gallery contexts, elevates the source material to be something worthy of display in a major art museum rather than a mat to walk on as per Preston’s suggestions. |

### Week 5 – Tony Albert

**Learning intention**

H7, H8, H9, H10

Students learn about contemporary artist Tony Albert, a descendant of the Girrimay, Yidinji and Kuku Yalandji peoples of far north Queensland who works with his vast collection of ‘Aboriginalia’ – kitsch design objects featuring representations of Aboriginal peoples – to comment on how Aboriginal people are viewed in Australian society.

Students access video and text sources where Tony Albert discusses his practice of collecting ‘Aboriginalia’ and using it as a material in his artmaking. Students analyse Tony Albert’s intentions, choices and actions revealed in his discussion of his 2008 work [*Sorry*](https://learning.qagoma.qld.gov.au/artworks/sorry/).

Students consider works from Tony Albert’s 2021 exhibition [Conversations with Margaret Preston](https://www.sullivanstrumpf.com/artists/tony-albert/exhibitions/conversations-with-margaret-preston/works). Students use the cultural and postmodern frames to contrast Tony Albert’s appropriated artworks with the Margaret Preston artworks they refer to. Students read a review of the exhibition and collect quotes that reveal the meaning/impact of the works.

Students then complete a summary activity, using the [conceptual framework](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=and%20so%20on.-,The%20conceptual%20framework%20scaffold,-The%20conceptual%20framework) and [frames](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=resource%20google%2Dsite-,The%20frames%20scaffold,-As%20students%27%20progress) scaffolds to record some notes about Tony Albert.

#### Learning activities

The following learning activities relate to the Week 5 focus area.

#####  ‘Sorry’

Students watch the following two videos. where Tony Albert discusses his artmaking practice and his intentions, choices, and actions in making and exhibiting the artwork Sorry (2008). **Note:** The second video ‘Why does Tony Albert collect Aboriginalia’ has already been shown in Week 2 but may be viewed again in this lesson.

* [Tony Albert discusses 'Sorry' created for the National Apology in 2008 (2:34)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htlM8m6j6i8)
* [Why does Tony Albert collect Aboriginalia? (3:13)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPbd808PUiU)

Students read 2 short text excerpts discussing ‘Sorry’ that further reveal aspects of Tony Albert’s practice. Students use questions from the [practice scaffold](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=in%20the%20artworld.-,Practice%20in%20artmaking%2C%20art%20history%20and%20art%20criticism%20scaffold,-Students%20learn%20about) to discuss Tony Albert’s intentions, choices and actions.

The teacher might specify certain questions from the scaffold, for example:

* What are the artist's intentions?
* What conceptual choices has the artist made? What historical or social issues and what political ideas have informed this choice?
* How has the choice of materials and techniques informed the representation of their ideas?

This activity could be configured as a short-answer response similar to Section I of the HSC Visual arts exam. An example of a completed response is provided below.

Tony Albert has incorporated his vast collection of objects that he calls ‘Aboriginalia’ into his 2008 installation work Sorry, attaching pieces like plates, ashtrays, and wall hangings to large black letters that are mounted to the gallery wall to spell out the word ‘Sorry’. The objects are all decorative design pieces that are united by their outdated representations of Aboriginal people as exotic ‘others.’ Tony Albert juxtaposes these objects with the word ‘Sorry,’ referring to the 2008 apology to the Stolen Generations, and the primitivist depictions of Aboriginal people in Albert’s found objects stand as a reminder of the historical treatment of Aboriginal peoples in Australian history. In his artist statements, Tony Albert suggested that the configuration and placement of the letters in this work could be changed over time, and since 2011 he has requested that the letters be reversed to spell ‘YRROS’ – an inversion that raises the question of what has changed for Aboriginal people since the 2008 apology.

#####  ‘Conversations with Margaret Preston’ – Changing meanings

Students complete two activities related to Tony Albert’s 2021 exhibition [Conversations with Margaret Preston](https://www.sullivanstrumpf.com/artists/tony-albert/exhibitions/conversations-with-margaret-preston/works). Links are provided to specific artworks. However, it may be useful to review the full exhibition website to view installation photographs and images of some of the other artworks.

Students use the frames to compare different meanings in Tony Albert and Margaret Preston’s artworks using the [frames scaffold](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=resource%20google%2Dsite-,The%20frames%20scaffold,-As%20students%27%20progress).

Students use the cultural frame to consider Margaret Preston’s use of Aboriginal motifs and imagery in her work, as well as her intention to develop a distinctly Australian style/voice.

Students use the postmodern frame to consider Tony Albert’s use of appropriation and found materials to challenge historical practices and conventions in the artworld.

An example of a completed answer table has been provided below.

Table 13 – Example completed comparative meanings answer table

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Margaret Preston artworks (cultural frame) | Tony Albert artworks (postmodern frame) |
| *[Christmas bells](https://searchthecollection.nga.gov.au/object?uniqueId=78464)*[, 1925](https://searchthecollection.nga.gov.au/object?uniqueId=78464) by Margaret PrestonHand-coloured woodcut print featuring a large bouquet of flowers in a pot or vase. Print approx. 30 × 30cm.The flowers are Australian wildflowers including Christmas Bells and Banksia – this selection aligns with Preston’s intention to promote Australian imagery in her practice.The pot features a repeated chevron or boomerang styled pattern on the surface – this is similar to Preston’s illustration of a design from a Taphoglyph (Aboriginal carved tree) from 1925, consistent with her intention to use Aboriginal designs and motifs in her own artmaking practice. | [*Conversations with Preston: Christmas Bells*, 2020](https://www.sullivanstrumpf.com/artists/tony-albert/exhibitions/conversations-with-margaret-preston/views/ta2021-17-image-2-2-2-2-2/) by Tony AlbertA large artwork – 300 × 400cm over two panelsAn appropriation artwork, recreating the composition of Margaret Preston’s Christmas Bells. The image of a large bouquet of native flowers in a pot or vase is set against a plain background. To provide the colour in the floral arrangement, Tony Albert has used selections from his collection of ‘Aboriginalia’ fabrics, which provide bright colours and complex textures – a close inspection reveals the collage of Aboriginal-styled designs throughout the fabric samples.Tony Albert has used larger, more recognisable sections of fabric arranged in a grid pattern to fill in the pot or vase. Here, the ‘Aboriginalia’ images and text are clearly visible.Tony Albert has appropriated from both Margaret Preston and his collection of found ‘Aboriginalia’ fabrics, and his composition critiques both aspects of this source material. |
| [Australian legend, number 3: The kangaroo hunt, circa 1957](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/207.1977/) by Margaret PrestonColour woodcut print on tan paper, printed area approx. 30 × 30 cmThe image depicts a kangaroo hunt. Two simple silhouettes of Aboriginal figures are shown in the foreground wielding hunting tools (spears, boomerangs). Three large kangaroos occupy the centre of the frame, which have been painted in earthy yellows and reds in a stylised x-ray geometric pattern, likely adapted from a bark painting or other traditional Aboriginal artmaking. Simple silhouettes of dogs and trees fill the background. Two footprints and a line of animal tracks are also visible, although the tracks are the simple arrow shapes usually used to represent emus rather than kangaroos.This represents another example of Margaret Preston appropriating Aboriginal designs and themes in her artmaking – specifically, the hunting scene, the designs used on the kangaroos, and the charcoal and ochre palette (black and warm yellows and oranges), consistent with her intention to explore Aboriginal themes and motifs in search of an Australian national style.The use of emu tracks rather than kangaroo may be an error that signifies her limited understanding of the source material. | [Conversations with Preston: Kangaroo, 2020](https://www.sullivanstrumpf.com/artists/tony-albert/exhibitions/conversations-with-margaret-preston/views/ta2020-197-image2-2-2/) by Tony AlbertAn appropriation artwork, using found ‘Aboriginalia’ fabric and acrylic paint hand-colouring to recreate the main composition of Margaret Preston’s Australian legend: the kangaroo hunt.This work on paper is much smaller than Tony Albert’s version of Christmas Bells. On a 76 × 58cm sheet of high-quality paper, the square image is similar in size to Preston’s original print.In this example, Tony Albert has simplified the composition, removing some trees to focus on the men hunting, kangaroos, dogs, and human and animal tracks. These major features have dark outlines, with the collaged ‘Aboriginalia’ fabric cut outs filling the shapes. Tony Albert has hand-coloured parts of the image in warm, pale yellow and brown colours, another aspect of Preston’s practices that he is appropriating in these works.He has added a simple border around the main composition, which is just discernible as a calendar featuring Aboriginal designs, an obvious record of the original use of the fabric as a decorative home décor object.Cut out text is presented underneath the main images as if it were a label, and the use of the outdated language of ‘AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINIES’ reminds audiences of the origins of the source material used in this artwork.Like in Gordon Bennett’s Home Décor (after M. Preston) series, Albert’s use of materials and presentation in a gallery context adds a perspective to this as a piece of fine art, elevating it from the design objects used as source material, and continuing the theme of challenging outdated and problematic representations and use of Aboriginal themes by non-Aboriginal artists and designers. |
| [The Expulsion, 1952](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/DA64.1967/) by Margaret PrestonA gouache painting, depicting the biblical scene of Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden.Adam and Eve are represented as an Aboriginal couple wearing loincloths. ‘Adam’ has a despairing facial expression and is raising one hand to the sky, ‘Eve’ looks calm and is breastfeeding an infant.A pale angelic figure is brandishing a whip and a sword, standing behind a padlocked chain link gate and a wooden picket fence to cast out the couple.Behind the fence, ‘Eden’ is occupied by Australian flowers and trees, kangaroos, and a koala. The foreground also features plants, but they are represented as thorny. The native Sturt’s Desert Pea is shown alongside introduced thistles.This painting is another example of Preston’s use of Aboriginal imagery as well as Australian native plants and animals in her work as part of an effort to develop an Australian style.This painting may represent an effort by Preston to cast Aboriginal people as Adam and Eve, the ‘original’ humans, however the symbolism of a white angelic figure casting the Aboriginal family out from behind a locked gate seems to align more closely to the history of dispossession of Aboriginal people from their lands. | [Conversations with Preston: Expulsion, 2020](https://www.sullivanstrumpf.com/exhibitions/conversations-with-margaret-preston/art/works/ta2020-189-image2-2-2/) by Tony AlbertIn his appropriation, Tony Albert has enlarged the original painting, perhaps to give it greater significance among the other works in the Conversations with Margaret Preston exhibition.The appropriation retains key elements of the original, as if to accentuate them – the ‘angel’ figure has its face and arms painted in a pale flesh tone to continue to highlight the racial differences – and power imbalance - between the figures. The Aboriginal figures are represented using sections of appropriated ‘Aboriginalia’ fabric featuring similarly near-nude Aboriginal people, reinforcing the stereotypical representation used by both Margaret Preston and the fabric designers.Many of the animal and floral elements are represented using fabric cut-outs of whole images – in waratahs and x-ray kangaroo are both prominent.In this appropriation, Tony Albert makes a clear criticism of the racial stereotypes represented in both Preston’s The Expulsion, and the Aboriginal figures shown in the found fabric. |

##### Exhibition review

Students read Angela Goddard’s review of [Conversations with Margaret Preston’](https://issuu.com/sullivanstrumpf/docs/marapr_2021/32?ff) and record some key quotes that further reveal the meaning and impact of Tony Albert’s artworks. It is recommended to download a copy of the review to enable copy/pasting of text. The full text or selected quotes could be provided to students to identify references to artist, artwork, world, and audience using different coloured highlighters.

The teacher might note that this is the official publication of Sullivan + Strumpf, the contemporary art gallery that represents Tony Albert and exhibited Conversations with Margaret Preston. The writer, Angela Goddard, is the director of the Griffith University Art Museum, a contemporary public art gallery in Brisbane.

An example of a completed quote table has been provided below.

Table 14 – Example completed quote table for exhibition review

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Quote | Meaning/impact |
| An important strand of Tony Albert’s practice is appropriated and abstracted Aboriginal designs, symbols, and caricature images of Aboriginal people, under a loose banner termed ‘Aboriginalia.’ In this latest series of works Conversations with Margaret Preston, Albert turns to the well-known oeuvre of Australian modernist printmaker and painter Margaret Preston (1875 to 1963). | Gives background and context for this series and how it fits into Tony Albert’s practice, as well as a simple definition for ‘Aboriginalia’ |
| However benevolent in intent, an expression of a larger interest in Aboriginal art and culture informed by her travels throughout Australia, these exhortations have since been criticised by subsequent generations for their casual lack of understanding of the appropriation of sacred designs. | Gives further context for Margaret Preston’s legacy and impact on Australian attitudes towards Aboriginal art and culture. |
| Albert’s interest lies in the consequences of Preston’s encouragements – these kitsch caricatures of Aboriginal designs and motifs still found on tea towels, tablecloths, table runners, handkerchiefs, placemats, and lengths of fabric, rather than the sophisticated abstraction she envisioned. | Explains Tony Albert’s interest in Preston’s legacy and gives examples of the kind of objects he has used in this body of work. |
| Preston saw the use of Aboriginal imagery as a vehicle, a way for Australian artists to make truly original contributions to the pursuit of Modernism. Art historian Ian MacLean asks if Bennett’s works both parody Preston as well as participate in and reproduce her framing of Aboriginality within modernism. Albert is also doing this and more - not making a damning call to denounce Preston, but, as the title of this series title suggests, answering her call to dialogue with Aboriginal art and motifs with his own conversation, while also demonstrating that the ambition to ‘be Aboriginal’ has resulted in the sometimes grotesque caricatures we see in these fabrics, which counteract the positive spirit of her making. | Makes an artworld connection between Margaret Preston, Gordon Bennett, and Tony Albert, and explains Tony Albert’s position as initiating a dialogue about Preston’s works rather than simply condemning her. |
| ‘At the core of my work is a kind of reconciliation with these racist objects’ very existence. Yes, they are painful reiterations of a violent and oppressive history, but we cannot hide or destroy them because they are an important societal record that should not be forgotten. I’m trying to reconcile those two positions.’ | This quote from Tony Albert further explains his intention to come to terms with the objects he has used, and Preston’s practice. |

##### Summarising

Students use the [conceptual framework scaffold](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=and%20so%20on.-,The%20conceptual%20framework%20scaffold,-The%20conceptual%20framework) and questions from the [postmodern and cultural frames](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=resource%20google%2Dsite-,The%20frames%20scaffold,-As%20students%27%20progress) found in the frames scaffold to record some notes about Tony Albert.

This activity could be configured as groupwork, with students assigned different areas of content to focus on and then sharing their notes with the class. Sample responses have been provided.

Table 15 – Example summarising activity responses

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Content area | Notes |
| Artwork | Conversations with Margaret Preston is a series of mixed media works by Tony Albert exhibited in 2021. Many of the works are appropriations of Margaret Preston artworks, where Tony Albert reproduces the subject and composition of the original works using found fabric samples from his collection of ‘Aboriginalia.’The found fabric material used in Conversations with Margaret Preston is an example of ‘Aboriginalia,’ described by art critic Angela Goddard as ‘kitsch caricatures of Aboriginal designs and motifs still found on tea towels, tablecloths, table runners, handkerchiefs, placemats, and lengths of fabric.’The artworks in Conversations with Margaret Preston are intended to start a dialogue about Margaret Preston’s use of Aboriginal motifs in her work and her encouragement to other artists and designers to use Aboriginal imagery for home decoration, and the actual design objects that were made in the 20th century, which Tony Albert features in his work.Art critic Angela Goddard notes that Tony Albert is ‘not making a damning call to denounce Preston, but, as the title of this series title suggests, answering her call to dialogue with Aboriginal art and motifs with his own conversation’ about the impact of Preston’s work on Australian art and design in the 20th century.Sorry is an earlier work from 2008 which also uses ‘Aboriginalia’ found objects – including 3D objects like plates and ashtrays. Sorry is an installation consisting of 99 objects affixed to large black vinyl letters that spell out the word ‘SORRY’. The artwork references the 2008 apology to the stolen generations, juxtaposing the word sorry with objects that represent historical representations of Aboriginal people that perpetuate primitivist stereotypes. For exhibitions after 2011, Tony Albert requested that the letters be reversed to spell ‘YRROS’ to question whether or not conditions have changed for Aboriginal people since the apology. |
| Artist | Tony Albert is a contemporary Aboriginal artist, descended from the Girrimay, Yidinji and Kuku Yalandji peoples of far north Queensland. Many of his artworks are installations featuring text and found objects, but he also works with photography, video, painting, sculpture, and mixed media. He selects materials and techniques to support his conceptual practice, which investigates the experience of Aboriginality in contemporary Australian society, and historical experiences and representation of Aboriginal people.He was a founding member of the proppaNOW collective, along with other contemporary Aboriginal artists Richard Bell and Vernon Ah Kee, who also frequently explore the social experiences of Aboriginal people and the impact of colonisation in Australia.A major aspect of Tony Albert’s practice is collecting objects he calls ‘Aboriginalia.’ He often uses these objects directly in his artmaking as found objects to recontextualise them, and to make statements about issues like race, culture, and identity in Australia.Tony Albert often discusses his practice in interviews and videos which he uses to explain his intentions, material, and conceptual choices, and meaning in his works. These are often shared by galleries he exhibits in as promotional or educational material. |
| Audience | In Conversations with Margaret Preston, audiences are brought into the dialogue. Tony Albert deliberately doesn’t make a conclusive value judgement of Margaret Preston but invites audiences to arrive at their own conclusions.He communicates this intent through the artworks themselves (juxtaposition of Preston’s work and ‘Aboriginalia’ images, use of the word ‘Conversations’ in the titles) as well as supporting material like videos produced as promotional material for the exhibition where he gives Margaret Preston accolades as ‘one of Australia’s greatest painters’ and ‘courageous’ for her era, but also questions the impact of her work on representations of Aboriginal people and culture.Other works like Sorry might be more confronting for audiences as they engage with social issues directly rather than filtering them through an art historical investigation. Through the juxtaposition of text and ‘Aboriginalia’ found objects, ‘Sorry’ challenges audiences to confront and reconsider their understanding of social issues impacting Aboriginal people, in particular the stolen generations. This challenge is amplified when the work is presented as YRROS, adding a layer of meaning for audiences to decode and reflect on. Again, this message is further elucidated by Tony Albert’s artist statements in videos that are often presented by art galleries as support and promotional material for exhibitions. |
| World | Tony Albert’s artworks often use the symbolic value of ‘Aboriginalia’ objects to comment on the current and historical experiences and representation of Aboriginal people, and the impact of colonisation.In Conversations with Margaret Preston, Tony Albert initiates an art historical dialogue, reinterpreting Margaret Preston’s appropriation of Aboriginal imagery and culture through his use of found objects. He links Margaret Preston’s practice of using Aboriginal motifs in search of an Australian national art to the proliferation of stereotypical and primitivist representations of Aboriginal people in home décor designs like tea towels, ashtrays, and decorative wall hangings.In Sorry, Tony Albert directly engages with a political issue – the 2008 apology to the stolen generations. He made the work the same year, juxtaposing the word ‘SORRY’ with objects from his collection of ‘Aboriginalia,’ which feature stereotypical and primitivist representations of Aboriginal people. This contrast invites a comparison between historical and contemporary perceptions of Aboriginal people. After 2011 he requested that galleries display the text in reverse as ‘YRROS’, questioning what meaningful social or political changed occurred since the apology. |
| Postmodern frame | Tony Albert challenges stereotypical and primitivist conceptions of Aboriginal people by incorporating ‘Aboriginalia’ found objects as a central part of his artmaking practice.Uses text to make his ideas explicit and obvious, juxtaposing these ideas with the objects from his collection. This challenges audiences to reconsider their preconceptions about social issues, Aboriginal people, and Australian history.Uses appropriation to directly engage with Margaret Preston’s work, revealing that her legacy of using Aboriginal imagery in her work contributed to the phenomenon of ‘Aboriginalia’ and problematic representations of Aboriginal people in art and design. |
| Cultural frame | Responds to current and historical representations and ideas about Aboriginal people by using found objects from his collection of ‘Aboriginalia.’Responds directly to contemporary political issues in works like Sorry as a form of social commentary or protest.Belongs to the proppaNOW collective, a group of contemporary Aboriginal artists who respond to social issues about Aboriginality and Australian society and history. |

### Week 6 – Putting it all together

**Learning intention**

H7, H8, H9, H10

Students summarise their understanding of the content in this case study, selecting two key works from each of the three artists and making summary notes they can refer to as study material.

Students then communicate their knowledge and understanding of the content in this case study by attempting an exam style extended response question from one of the Visual Arts content areas of practice, conceptual framework, and the frames.

Additional exam resources, including past exams, marking guidelines, and feedback on the written exam, can be found on the NESA website for [Stage 6 Visual Arts](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/stage-6-creative-arts/visual-arts-syllabus).

#### Learning activities

The following learning activities relate to the Week 6 focus area.

##### Scaffolding

Students select key works from the case study and make summary notes that they can refer to as study material. Use of the [conceptual framework scaffold](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/creative-arts/stage-6/visual-arts#:~:text=and%20so%20on.-,The%20conceptual%20framework%20scaffold,-The%20conceptual%20framework) is suggested. However, the teacher could reconfigure this activity to suit the class context by modelling note making or using a paragraph writing scaffold.

##### Extended response

This activity is designed to model the conditions of Section II of the Visual Arts HSC examination; however, it could be adapted by the teacher to suit the class context. Extended responses could be modelled or scaffolded by the teacher to align to existing school or faculty resources such as specific paragraph structures or essay writing tools.

If the teacher identifies a need for students to practise short answer responses for Section I of the Visual Arts HSC examination, the provided questions could be reconfigured to refer to artwork images and other source material from the case study.

The questions could be used to develop an assessment task or examination.

## References

**Links to third-party material and websites**

Please note that the provided (reading/viewing material/list/links/texts) are a suggestion only and implies no endorsement, by the New South Wales Department of Education, of any author, publisher, or book title. School principals and teachers are best placed to assess the suitability of resources that would complement the curriculum and reflect the needs and interests of their students.

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[Visual Arts Stage 6 Syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/stage-6-creative-arts/visual-arts-syllabus) © 2016 NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales.

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