

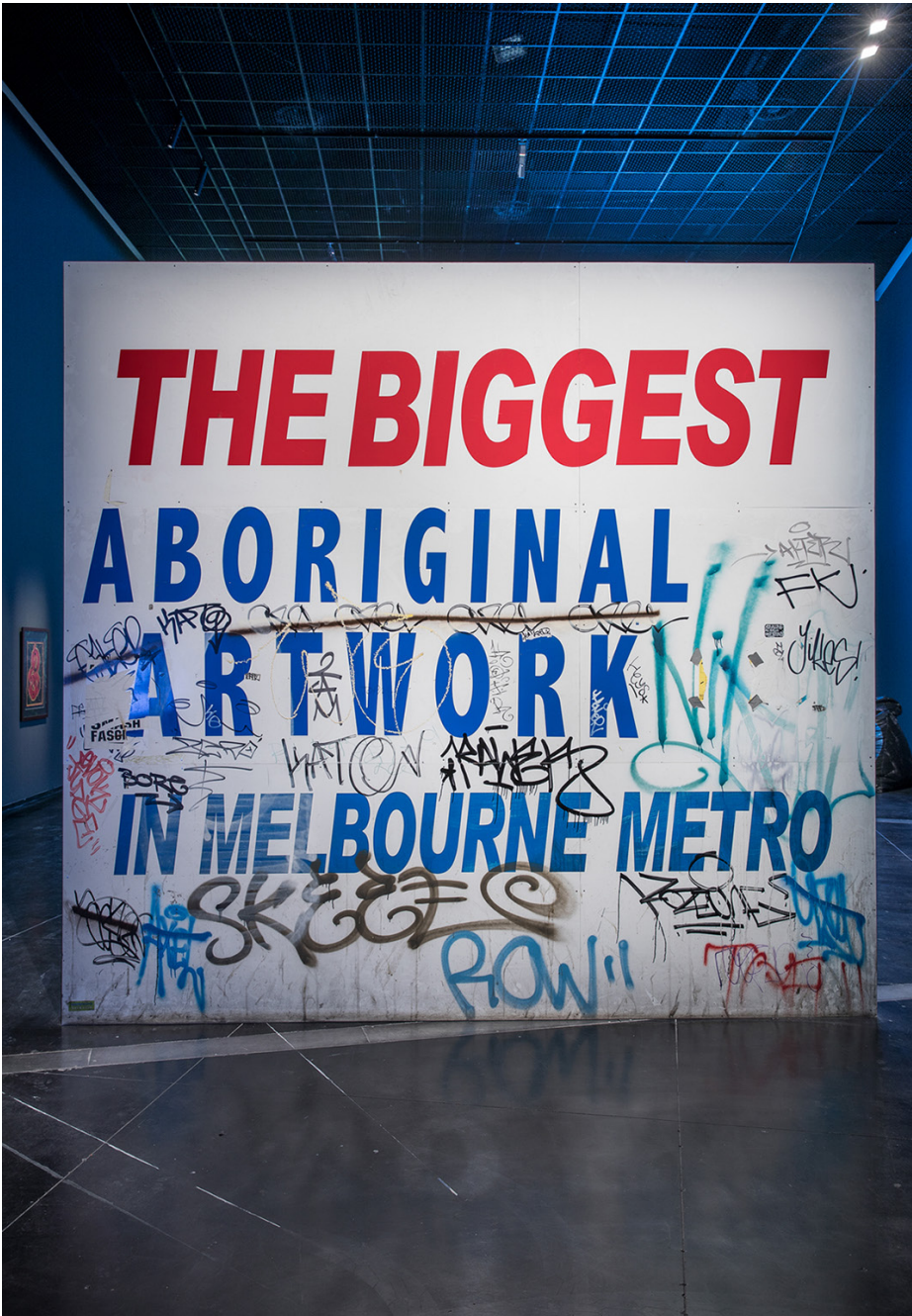
CULTURE + HISTORIES = PLACE

This is a resource for school-based units to be adapted and extended for primary and secondary students, centred upon an investigation of artist Steven Rhall's practice. It includes several activities to result the creation of artworks inspired by Rhall's photographic practice, and his sculptural installation artwork *The biggest Aboriginal artwork in Melbourne metro* featured in the exhibition *Sovereignty*. These activities are modelled to correspond to the Victorian Curriculum and to be adaptable to students of all year levels.

THE ARTIST

Steven Rhall's practice examines public space and traditional country with a critical attention to the multiple different layers of culture and history, both Indigenous and colonial, that combine and intersect to create the everyday places and spaces we inhabit. Rhall's interdisciplinary practice responds to the cultural landscape, creating networks of interconnected signs and symbols. Reflecting upon both medium specificity and cultural semiotics, Rhall merges 'post-colonial' and interpersonal narratives and his installations often include video, found objects and advertising materials.

Image: Steven Rhall, *The biggest Aboriginal artwork in Melbourne metro* 2014-16. Installation view, *Sovereignty*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art Melbourne 2016-17. Photograph: Andrew Curtis



PRIMARY ACTIVITIES

LEVELS F-3: DREAM SCHOOL

Explore & Express Ideas

Explore ideas, experiences, observations and imagination and express them through subject matter in visual artworks they create.

Explore:

Rhall is interested in how different marks, lines and traces make up the environments in which we live. Students will explore their school yard and observe how different types of marks have been used to divide areas of the school. Students will begin exploring and then express their surroundings by drawing a bird's eye view map of an area of their school, playground or classroom that maps, for example, lines on basketball courts, fence boundaries, paths through the school, and different types of flooring surfaces (carpet, floorboards, lino). The central question is, how do different lines, divides, or surfaces tell us about the way that students should use that space - sport, play, science, cooking, etc?

Create:

Once this observation stage is complete, students are to use their imaginations to draw a new plan for their dream school as they imagine it on a fresh sheet of paper. Some questions to ask could be: How would they use space? What new functions might spaces have? How much of the school is for playing and how much is for learning? What colours would they use and why? What different boundaries and spaces might

they include in their ideal school? Ask students to consider what their ideas of a perfect school space might be, and what other places have they experienced, at home or away, might be appropriate to adapt for their dream school creation.

Timeframe:

This is an adaptive unit that could be completed over either two single or double sessions, or alternatively extended over several weeks through elaboration.

Materials & Equipment:

- A3 paper
- Grey lead pencils
- Coloured pencils or textas
- Drawing boards
- Blutac



Image: Steven Rhall, *Boundary (Border Country, Footscray)* 2012.
Courtesy the artist.

PRIMARY ACTIVITIES

LEVELS 4-6: REIMAGINING THE INDIGENOUS LANDSCAPE

Present & Perform

Create and display art work considering how ideas can be expressed to an audience.

Rhall is interested in the different histories overlaid upon land 'Country'. In the Australian context this is most apparent in the difference between Indigenous peoples perspective on the history of Australia, and that of colonial descendants and others. Students are to create an immersive assemblage in their classroom based upon the landscape in which their school exists. The focus will be on researching the landscape of their area as it would have been prior to colonisation. Essentially the landscape in a natural state - and what flora and fauna would have been there.

Research:

Divide students into groups to use the Internet to research the indigenous plants and animals of the area and to gather photographs from online and library books to help identify the plants. Students are to use this information to create an installation in a space at school that will aim to communicate to the viewer what the landscape would have appeared like prior to colonisation. With a teacher's help, students find out for what purposes Indigenous peoples used, and might still use, these plants.

Experiment & Create:

Using some large pieces of paper and textas students are to experiment with drawing the different plant and animal species at lifesize. They then cut them out and experiment with how to prop and position them throughout the space to create a 'virtual' experience of the landscape and how it might have been prior to European arrival. Students might want to gather some eucalypt branches too. The scent of the eucalypt will add another sensory dimension to the installation.

Present:

Invite another class into the installation to experience what the students have created. Before students tell them what it is, have them ask the others what they think they are looking at. For later discussion, note what they observe - did they guess? After that the students can tell them about the class project and explain what they learned about the landscape through research.

Materials & Equipment:

- Classroom computers or tablets
- A3 or larger paper for sketching indigenous plants and animals
- Grey lead pencils
- Coloured pencils or textas
- Bluetac, tape or pins
- Samples of local indigenous flora



Image: Steven Rhall, *Bunjil Park (Dja Dja Wurrung, Summerfield/*
Courtesy the artist.

SECONDARY ACTIVITIES

LEVELS 7-8: PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTARY

Visual Arts Practices

Experiment with materials, techniques, technologies and processes in a range of art forms to express ideas, concepts, and themes in artworks.

Rhall uses his training in photography to create many of his artworks. An excellent use of photography is as a means of recording observations and capturing interesting details from the world around us. Students are to put on 'a new pair of eyes' to first observe, and then record their everyday school environment. The idea is for students to observe the everyday features that often are 'invisible' in their day-to-day activities, and to think how these features directly affect the ways in which they use the spaces of the school.

Following page images: (clockwise from top left):

Steven Rhall, *Flinders, Cook, Bass, Tasman* (Wathaurung, Belmont). Inkjet print.

Steven Rhall, *Division* (Woiwurrung, Footscray). Inkjet print.

Steven Rhall, *Presland's intersection 1b* (Woiwurrung, Boonwurrung, Wathaurung). Inkjet print

Steven Rhall, *Cult figures* (Woiwurrung, East Brunswick) 2013. Inkjet print.

All works courtesy the artist.

Observe:

Students search their school address using Google Maps and then select 'Street View'. What do they notice about the school when you look through this particular 'outsider' perspective? They should try to imagine it is their first day again and everything is new. What building materials have been used? Which plants have been planted, are they native or introduced species? What signs are that this is a space designed for children to occupy? They can list five 'ordinary' things they notice and the reason why they noticed them. Do they shape the school significantly? Do they seem out of place or strange?

Record:

In pairs students are to set out into the school grounds and maintain a 'fresh pair of eyes'. They are to find five things not seen in the Google Street View they find as odd or significant. It might be where certain fences are positioned, the colour of a specific wall, or the placement of a piece of play equipment, for example. They are to use the power of photography to 'frame' observations, and attempt to cut out all unnecessary visual information so it is clear to viewers what their interest is.

Assemble:

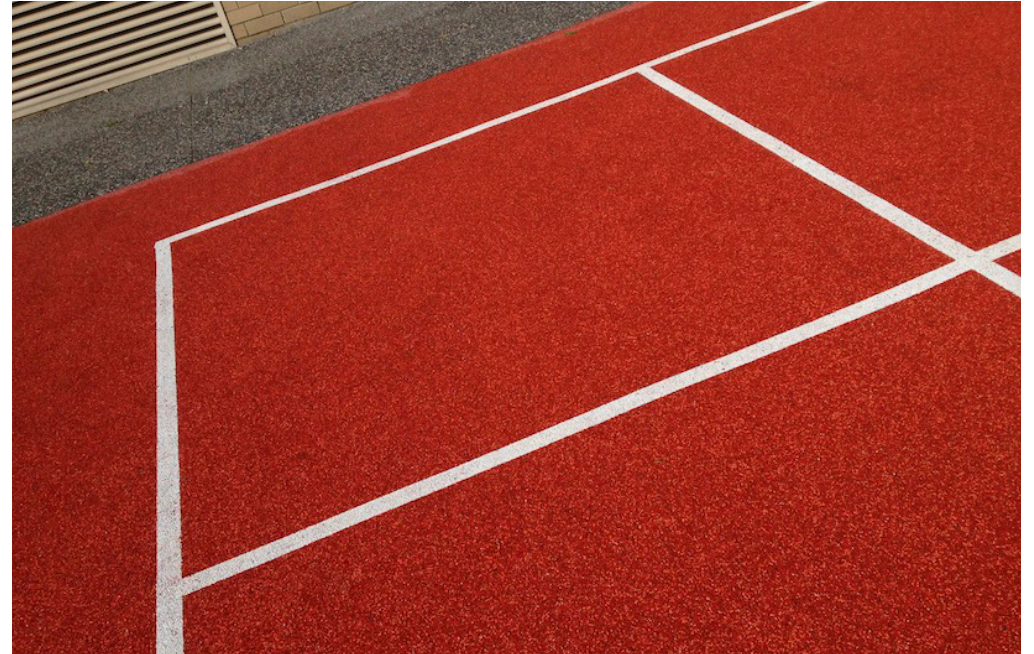
Depending on resources, students can either print their five photographs or assemble them into a digital album using Powerpoint. On a final page or slide students are to write a short paragraph explaining the reasons why they chose the features that they did. Students are to present their observations to another pair from the class and have them do the same - it might be surprising what the other pair notice.



Images:

Steven Rhall, *Boundary* (Border Country, Footscray) 2012. 105.8 x 83.9 cms, Inkjet print. Courtesy the artist.

Steven Rhall, *First time visited, long time lived* (Taungurung, Bonnie Doon) 2012. 83.9 x 105.8 cms. Courtesy the artist.





Both Images:
Steven Rhall, *The biggest Aboriginal artwork in Melbourne metro*
2014-16, 140 X 114cm, inkjet print.

SECONDARY ACTIVITIES

LEVELS 9-10: BIG ISSUE ARTWORKS

Explore & Express Ideas

Explore the visual arts practices and styles as inspiration to develop a personal style, explore, express ideas, concepts.

Rhall holds the agency of the individual as immensely important to society and cultures and, as such, his own artistic practice often functions to exercise his agency in dialogue with issues that are important to him. An example of this is Rhall's artwork in *Sovereignty* which involved the artist intervening into existing signage to bring a level of visibility to Aboriginal presence in his home suburb of Footscray, where the sign was originally installed.

Think:

Agency is an action or intervention that produces a particular effect. Ask students to think about their own personal agency, and how does it influences their daily activities, decisions and movements. If somebody decides to make an artwork about a particular idea they are expressing agency through creativity - putting something into the world that could influence or make an impression upon someone else.

Experiment:

Students are to brainstorm ideas for an artwork that expresses their agency. It could be a political, environmental, personal or social issue that they would like to comment on through art. They are to list ten ideas, then isolate the best five, then the single most important from that group.

Make:

Similar to Rhall students are to create a text-based artwork which expresses their agency. They are to think about protest banners they might have seen, or posters displayed in public spaces. How have they used language to be subversive or ambiguous? Students are to imagine that their artwork will be seen in public by others. They are to think of keywords or phrases to do with their idea and then experiment with scale, colour, contrast and hierarchy. When finished, students are to make a display of the class' artwork in an outdoor area of the school, and note in their visual diary how, and if, people react to their artwork.

Materials & Equipment:

- Visual diaries for brainstorming
- Grey lead pencils for design trials
- Coloured pencils, paints or textas
- A3 or larger thick paper or card for poster artworks
- Blutac, tape or pins