

# Boundary Lines

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# Education Resource

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## ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource has been created for use by teachers and students to engage with artworks and themes in the exhibition *Boundary Lines* at Griffith University Art Museum. The exhibition provides engaging cross-curriculum connections for units of study relating to colonial histories, Indigenous experience, memory, place and cultural identity in the Arts, Social Sciences and beyond. This resource can be utilised by school groups visiting the exhibition or to assist with learning experiences in the classroom.

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## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

*Boundary Lines* brings together Australian and international artists who explore the way governments and institutions use real and hidden modes of control to regulate human behaviour in public spaces.

The works in the exhibition ask us to consider our physical place in the world, how spaces are designed to dominate individuals and communities, and the impact this type of control has on our expectations, experiences and memories. The artists investigate the implications of travel, migration and colonisation, and the ways that governments, museums and other institutions categorise and confine people and objects.

By acknowledging that our understanding of history also determines our present day and future encounters, the artists propose that, in the face of brutal tragedy, a rebellious hope can also be felt.

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## ARTISTS

Vernon Ah Kee (AU)  
Daniel Boyd (AU)  
Carol McGregor (AU)  
Rosângela Rennó (BR)  
et al. (NZ)

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## KEY THEMES

Disrupted spaces	Grief and loss
Control and domination	Absence
Inherited trauma	Colonial histories
Memory	Human rights
Immigration/Migration	Asylum seekers

## KEY CONCEPTS

Museums and archives as rich source material for conceptualising and constructing artworks.

The ongoing effect of colonisation on Indigenous peoples.

Traversing literal and metaphorical spaces (eg. geographical, political, psychological).

Unlawful and problematic incarcerations of people (eg. through mandatory detainment or mandatory sentencing).

The colonial suppression of traditional ways and freedoms.

Institutional collections of Indigenous artefacts and resulting questions of repatriation.

Image:  
et al.

*No Good Common* (detail) 2018  
Mixed media installation

Courtesy the artists, Yuill | Crowley, Sydney, and Starkwhite, Auckland



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## FOCUS ARTWORK

Carol McGregor  
*Cornerstone* 2011-18  
Cast silver

Brisbane-based artist of Wathaurung (Victoria) and Scottish heritage Carol McGregor visited the British Museum in 2011 with the intention of seeing their extensive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collections. Despite several attempts over the preceding months to make the necessary appointments and contacts, McGregor was unable to access any of the museum's Indigenous Australian collections not on public display. The only item of Indigenous Australian origin on display during her visit was the Gweagal shield taken from the warrior Cooman, who was shot in the leg during first contact with Captain Cook's party at Botany Bay on 29 April 1770.

In her frustration, and having resolved to reclaim something back from the museum, McGregor paced along the Museum's grand south entrance and settled on a small gesture to mark her visit - she patted a hand-sized mixture of fast-drying impression putty (designed for taking dental impressions) to the corner of one of the iconic limestone column bases.

She described in her diary: '...The Silpression was made up of two putties that had to be kneaded together and I was aware it looked like dynamite putty. I mixed the putties inside my backpack then quickly took the mould and images of the mould on the corner.' She surreptitiously photographed the bright yellow moulding while it hardened, aware of the patrolling security guards. Upon returning to Australia, McGregor made a casting in silver from the moulding.

McGregor's gesture could be seen as an expression of defiance—a lone activist longing for a connection with the monumental building, and the institution itself. Her capturing the impression of the corner is a small act of ownership, and a reclamation of the contents within.

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## RESPONDING

Look closely at *Cornerstone* and describe the materials and techniques used by the artist in creating the work. What do you think is the significance of McGregor's decision to cast her sculptural piece in silver, a precious metal? Discuss your thoughts with a classmate.

Analyse the choice of display for this small sculptural artwork. Consider how placing the piece on top of a plinth might affect viewers' responses to the work, and how this display helps to communicate the artist's implied meaning.

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When McGregor visited the British Museum she noted that of the vast collection of Indigenous Australian objects held, only one item was on display. Acknowledging the spiritual and cultural significance of these items to contemporary Indigenous communities, draft a letter to the British Museum outlining the arguments supporting the repatriation of these important artefacts to their homelands.

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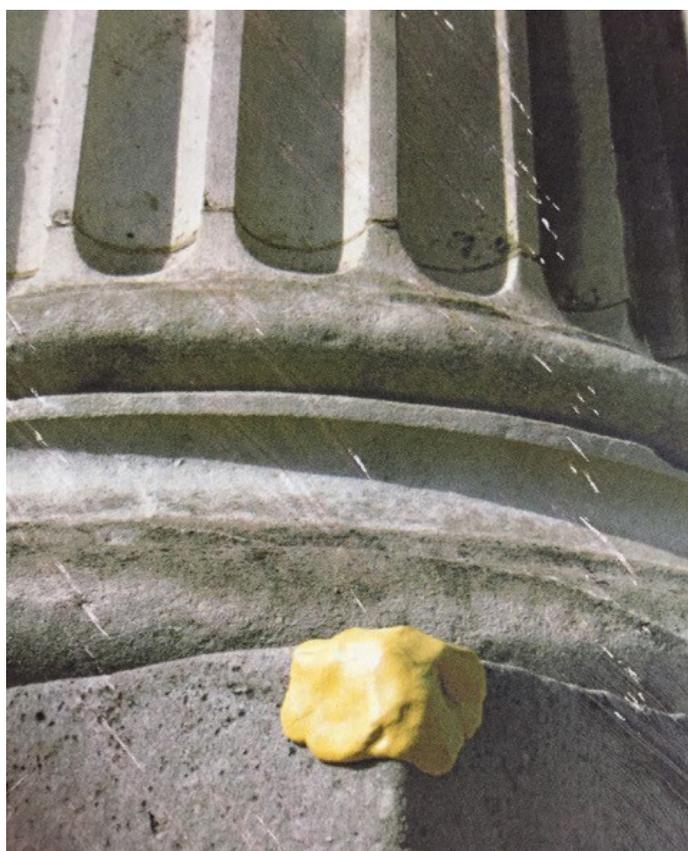
## MAKING

With the help of your teacher, experiment with the artistic technique of casting.

Find a selection of objects around your school that can be used to create small moulds and cast with materials available in your art room, such as epoxy, plaster or clay.

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Image:  
Carol McGregor  
*Cornerstone* 2011-18  
Image courtesy the artist



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## FOCUS ARTWORK

Daniel Boyd  
*Decommissioned skull boxes, Natural History Museum, London 2017*  
Cardboard boxes, ink

In 2011, Kudjla/Gangalu man Daniel Boyd undertook an artist residency at the Natural History Museum, London. He was particularly drawn to the Museum's collection of items from the First Fleet, which arrived on the coast of Australia 18 years after Captain James Cook first landed at Botany Bay on 29 April 1770.

Boyd's residency coincided with the museum's conservation unit rehousing the human remains collection, including several hundred items from Australia - which represent just some of the thousands of Aboriginal remains still scattered in museums around the world. Boyd became interested in the plain cardboard boxes used for storing human remains collected in the name of science. In any other context they would be unremarkable, but Boyd found these boxes retained a power and potency even without their contents. The cardboard was covered in stickers and diagrams, with some information redacted with thick black lines.

In its simplicity and scale, the sculptural work *Decommissioned skull boxes, Natural History Museum, London 2017* introduces an element of the material past, where the physical space of the viewer is placed in direct relation to the scale of the boxes.

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## RESPONDING

With a partner take a moment to contemplate Boyd's sculptural work. Considering the history behind their story, discuss what makes these otherwise non-descript boxes so powerful as works of art.

In the past, it was common for European explorers to take human remains and artefacts away from their homelands without permission. These items are still kept in the ethnographic collections of museums around the world. Do you think it is right for museums to keep these remains today? Write a personal reflection justifying your thoughts.

Daniel Boyd has a varied arts practice which includes the use of archival photographic images of Aboriginal people to create mixed media paintings. Choose an example of a painted work by Boyd to print and glue into your art journal. Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting the themes, materials and techniques of this work and *Decommissioned skull boxes*.

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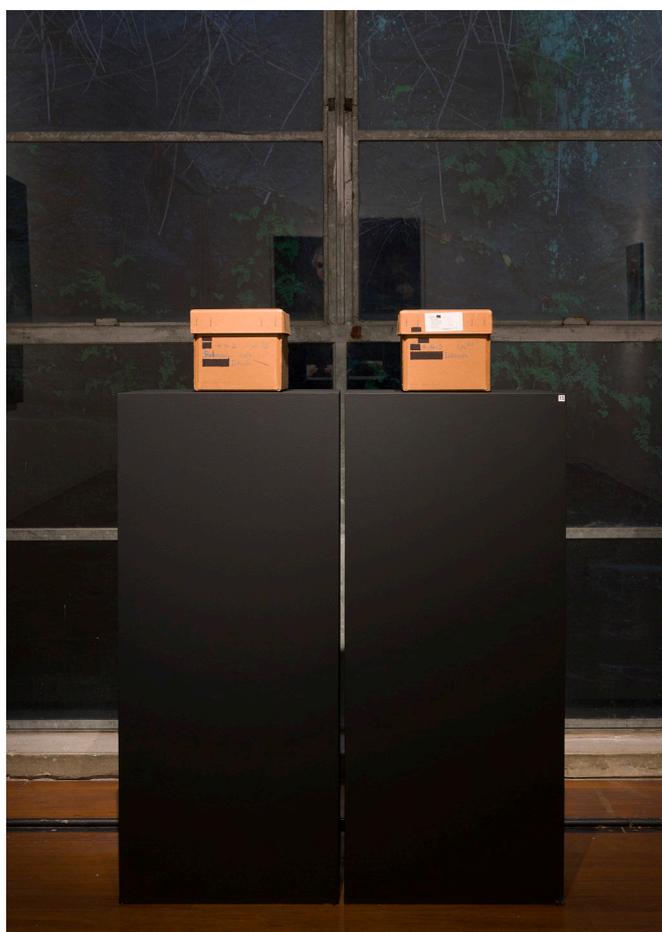
## MAKING

Referencing the suggested contents of *Decommissioned skull boxes*, complete a detailed study of a human skull using graphite pencil or charcoal.

Focus on various angles including front, back and sides.

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Image:  
Daniel Boyd  
*Decommissioned skull boxes, Natural History Museum, London 2017*  
Cardboard, ink, 17 x 17.5 x 25cm each.  
Courtesy the artist, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, and Station Gallery, Melbourne



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## FOCUS ARTWORK

Rosângela Rennó  
*Vera Cruz* 2000  
Video

Rosângela Rennó's video work *Vera Cruz*, 2000, addresses a moment of 'first contact' between the cultures of Europe and South America. The work references a first person account of this meeting, written by the knight Pêro Vaz de Caminha, sometimes described as "Brazil's birth certificate".

Pêro Vaz de Caminha, under the command of Pedro Álvares Cabral, accompanied the Portuguese armada of thirteen ships to India in 1500, and wrote the detailed official report of the first encounter with the landmass of Brazil and the indigenous Tupiniquim. Cabral and his fleet at first thought they had found an island and named it Ilha de Vera Cruz (Island of the True Cross).

The content of Caminha's letter is translated into subtitles along the base of the screen in Rennó's video *Vera Cruz*. There are no images, except for scratches and abrasions visible against a bleached out background, as if the film had been affected by five hundred years of repeated screenings. No voices can be heard; only the sounds of sea and wind remain as witnesses to the event.

Portuguese linguist and author Eduardo Mayone Dias has pointed out that Caminha's letter is 'marked by a deep sense of humanism', as it conveys a sense of mutual curiosity and a sincere belief in the potential of human connection. However, Rennó's work is also a lament. The idyllic and mutually curious scenario that Caminha recounts would not last very long.

The letter inevitably excludes an Indigenous perspective. Colonisation in Brazil, as in Australia and elsewhere, brought about a savage suppression of traditional ways and freedoms, a situation that continues. The apparently decayed film stock alludes to the blindness on both sides, each unable to fully apprehend the other.

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## RESPONDING

Why you think Rosângela Rennó has chosen the absence of imagery in her video work? How does this absence help communicate the artist's implied meaning? Note down your thoughts in your art journal and share with the class.

With a classmate, analyse why Rennó has chosen to use video to present her artwork to viewers rather than a still representation. How does the use of video enhance the viewers experience of the artwork?

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## MAKING

Using painting and collage techniques, create a visual representation to accompany *Vera Cruz*.

You could choose to make your artwork an abstract interpretation or a more realistic representation.

Explore your own individual art making style.

Image:  
Rosângela Rennó  
*Vera Cruz* 2000

Video installation, single-channel, 4:3, colour, sound  
Duration: 44mins

Conceptualisation and direction: Rosângela Rennó; Assistant director: Marilá Dardot; Editing: Fernanda Bastos; Sound: Ivan Capeller  
Original version in Portuguese, in Betacam/NTSC

