

2011
PROJECT 24
MICHAEL LANDY

PROJECT 24 / 2011

Acts of Kindness

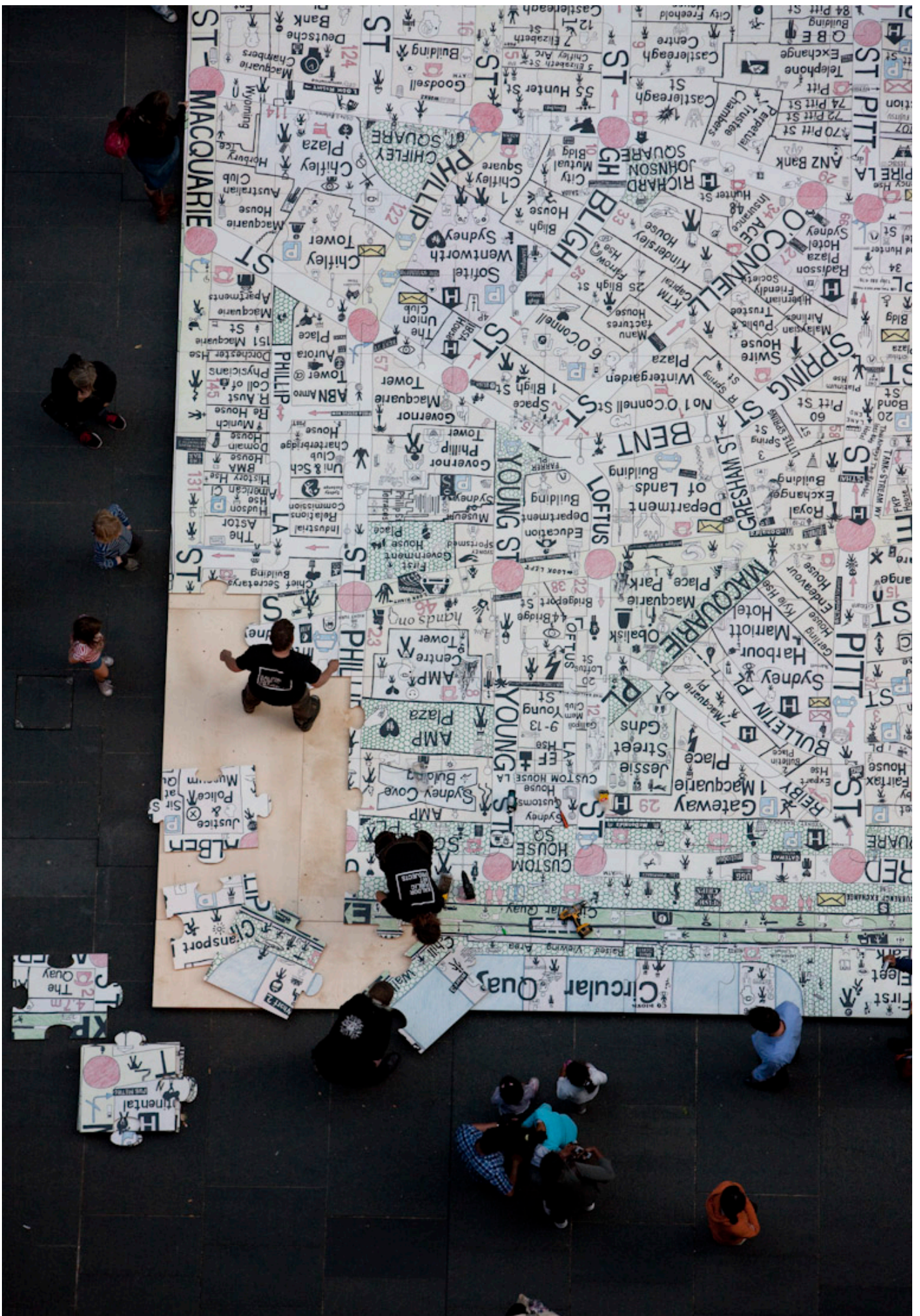
23 September - 23 October 2011

Sydney CBD – Martin Place

and selected sites throughout the city.

I am interested in everyday acts of kindness that mere mortals conduct ... they happen the whole time in a busy bustling city between complete strangers, where for that moment you make a connection between 'self' and 'other'.

Michael Landy 2011



Installing the final pieces of the *Acts of Kindness* jigsaw at Martin Place.

2011 PROJECT 24 MICHAEL LANDY



Acts of Kindness 2011

One of the 200 jigsaw pieces placed around Sydney's CBD containing stories of kind acts.

Photo: Paul Green

INTRODUCTION

British born artist Michael Landy is recognised as having created some of the most significant and memorable public art projects of the past decade.

His work explores and reflects on contemporary values and the experience of life in a consumer world. Michael Landy is interested in what we consume and what we discard, his work addresses economic worth and the importance of human relationships from an ethical and social viewpoint.

One of the group of Young British Artists (YBAs) of the 1990s, Landy is best known for his monumental performance and installation project *Break Down* (2001), commissioned by Artangel, in which he publicly and systematically destroyed all his personal belongings. 7,227 items, from his birth certificate to his car, were pulverised in the shopfront of a former department store in London's Oxford Street.

Other key works include *Semi-detached* (2004) for which he reproduced his parents' house to scale inside the galleries of Tate Britain, and *Art Bin* (2010), where he invited artists and members of the public to dispose of works of art, receiving contributions from fellow artists Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin and Gillian Wearing.

In addition to his major projects, Landy works across a range of media and is a skilled draughtsman, creating delicate, detailed drawings and collages on paper.

Landy's solo exhibitions include *Art Bin*, South London Gallery (2010), *Semi-detached*, Tate Britain (2004) and *Scrapheap Services* (1995–1996), Tate Gallery, London.

Selected group exhibitions include: *Sensation*, Royal Academy, London, and touring; Tate Liverpool(2009–2010); Hayward Gallery, London (2004); Kunstverein Frankfurt, (2003); Bloomberg Space, London (2003); Vancouver Art Gallery, 2003; São Paulo Biennale (2002); Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art (1999) and the Art Gallery of Ontario (1999); Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis (1995); Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (1995); Serpentine Gallery, London (1995) and the Castello di Rivoli, Turin (1989).

ARTIST

Michael Landy

Born 1963 in London, England

Lives and works in London, England

Michael Landy studied art at Loughton and Loughborough Universities before enrolling at Goldsmith's College in London. There he met a number of students who were to become prominent artists, including Damien Hirst, Gary Hume and Sarah Lucas.

In 1988, Landy exhibited in the famous *Freeze* exhibition orchestrated by Hirst in an empty London Port Authority building in the London Docklands. Hirst had secured funding for the exhibition and the production of a quality catalogue. *Freeze* launched these young artists' careers, which were characterised by an oppositional yet entrepreneurial attitude, media savvy and occasional shock tactics.



Michael Landy during the installation of *Acts of Kindness* 2011
Photo: Paul Green

WORKS – DRAWINGS AND COLLAGE

In 1982, whilst still a student, Michael Landy visited a retrospective exhibition of work by Jean Tinguely, the Swiss born Dada painter and sculptor (1925-1991) who created kinetic art, composed of sculptural machines activated by a motor.

In the late 1950s, Tinguely constructed a series of automatic drawing machines which he called 'Metamatics'. These kinetic sculptures used combinations of junk and chalk to mechanically produce abstract works of art and relied upon the viewer to push a button, pull a lever, or somehow activate the machine or work of art. These humorous, witty and ironic works owed a great deal to the Dadaist legacy of anti-art, challenging the boundaries of traditional static sculptural practice. Tinguely's Metamatics and his critique of rampant overproduction and consumption of material goods resonated with Landy, and would have a significant influence on his art practice.

At that time, Landy had begun filling his studio with piles of discarded objects he had collected, earning him the nickname 'Stacks' among his fellow students. For Landy, objects such as manhole covers, birdcages, teddy bear eyes and combs, contained a life and history of their own. He was both intrigued and concerned with the way society collects, consumes, values and discards objects.

In his *Scrapheap Services* drawing of 1995, represented in the John Kaldor Family Collection, human labour is depicted as integral to this cycle. The dense, intricate work penned in ink is one of a suite of drawings associated with the *Scrapheap Services* installation exhibited at the Tate Gallery, London that year.

The centre of the drawing features the large black text logo containing six, white, stylised cut-out male figures and the title of the fictitious cleaning service, 'SCRAPHEAP SERVICES'. Straddling the logo, a monster 'VULTURE' machine-like structure is being fed by a man dressed in full cleaning uniform, his face and head obscured by a helmet and visor. The 'cleaner' pours thousands of tiny cut-out shapes of male figures into the gaping mouth of the 'VULTURE'. Throughout the drawing the figure of the uniformed cleaner is repeated, engaged in the seemingly endless task of sweeping up these cut-out figures, discarded pieces of text and a variety of unwanted, used objects. In Landy's *Scrapheap Services* installation, life-size uniformed cleaning figures busily sweep up thousands of small male cut-out figures, which the artist created from refuse over a three-year period.

The words the cleaners sweep up represent the hollow rhetoric surrounding the plight of workers no longer deemed productive to the English economy. Workers made redundant and 'tossed on the scrap heap' under Britain's Conservative Party government. Landy's interest in transforming the mundane into art and recontextualising everyday objects is very much apparent in this comic book-style drawing.



Michael Landy
Scrapheap Services, 1995
ink on paper, 75.2 x 55.8cm



Michael Landy
Scrapheap Services, 1995
Installation, Tate Gallery
Copyright Michael Landy, courtesy of Thomas Dane Gallery



INSTALLATION AND PERFORMANCE

In 2001, Landy confronted his audience with his most subversive and powerful performance installation piece to date. *Break Down* was installed in the Oxford Street branch of a recently closed C&A clothing store. His two-week performance re-opened the store to the general public. Many of the 45,000 shoppers who attended were unaware they were viewing an artwork critiquing the material consumption in which they were engaged.

Break Down emerged from the artist's recent sale of *Scrapheap Services* to the Tate Gallery. Landy's long held desire to reject conventional, institutional exhibition spaces resulted in a philosophical reassessment of his own material success, a desire to separate his identity from his possessions. He resolved to destroy each one of his belongings and began by creating an inventory, giving each item a number and a full written description. Landy displayed the 7,227 items on the loop of a large conveyor belt, which resulted in each item being shredded (such as his jeans) or dismantled piece-by-piece (his Saab car). Amongst the items he destroyed were his birth certificate, his passport, credit cards, his own artworks, books, love letters, clothing and artworks given to him by well-known fellow artists.

Some members of Landy's audience attempted to purchase his shredded possessions and, to his dismay, even stole items from the conveyor belt. These responses served to underline the meaning of the work, alluded to in the title. *Break Down* suggests both the physical destruction of Landy's belongings, the potential impact of such an action upon the fabric of our social structures and the questioning of the artist's sanity.

Michael Landy

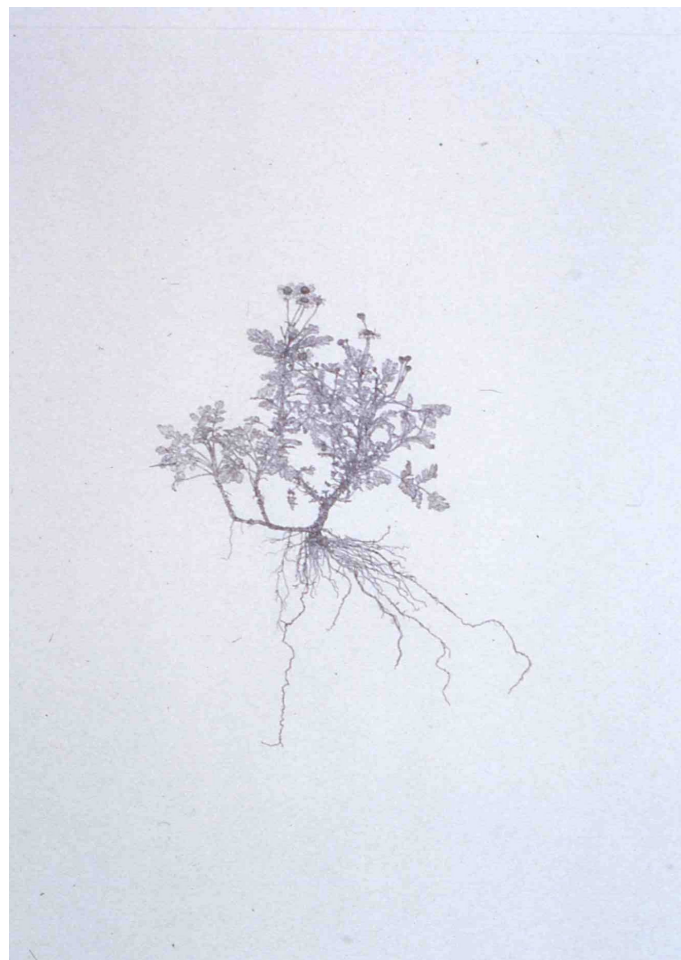
Break Down, 2001

C&A Oxford Street, London

Copyright Michael Landy. Courtesy Artangel

DRAWING AND ETCHING

Landy returned to drawing in the period following *Break Down*, exhibiting a series of finely rendered, botanical-style etchings of weeds titled *Nourishment* (2002). In stark contrast to the destruction of all his material goods in *Break Down*, these drawings celebrate nature's struggle for survival within the urban environment.



'Weeds' from the 2002
Nourishment etchings series
Above right: *Feverfew*
Above: *Bristley Ox-Tongue 2*

INSTALLATION, SOUND AND VIDEO

In 2004, the Tate Britain exhibited *Semi-detached*, the monumental and meticulously rendered sculptural replica of the front and rear façades of Landy's parent's home in the South Duveen and North Duveen Galleries.

In this poignant, personal work, rendered at full scale, Landy attempts to deal with the issues surrounding the horrific accident his father, a miner, suffered in a tunnel collapse in 1977. Severe spinal injuries left him housebound and unable to return to work. Landy suggests a parallel between the physical deterioration of the semi-detached house and his father's human form.

Three films, *Shelf Life*, *Four Walls* and *No. 62*, were projected on the reverse of each façade of the sculpted building. They refer to his father's previous penchant for working around the home, referencing his collection of tools, DIY manuals and videos. The visuals are overlaid with a soundtrack of his father whistling his favourite songs.

Semi-detached explores issues of labour and identity, and the consequences of one robbing the other, cruelly imposing a 'shelf-life' on a human being.



Semi-detached (rear façade) 2004
Installation, Tate Britain, London
Copyright Michael Landy. Courtesy Thomas Dane
Gallery, London

In *Art Bin*, 2010, Landy audaciously explores the construction of value systems in the art world.

A huge transparent glass bin, a receptacle for the disposal of artworks by artists, collectors, dealers and the general public, was installed in the South London Gallery. To participate, one had to apply online via a dedicated website, and once accepted, personally cast the precious or unwanted works of art into the bin. Artists such as Tracey Emin, Damien Hirst and Michael Landy himself, publicly hurled their own artworks into *Art Bin*.



Art Bin, 2010
South London Gallery
Copyright Michael Landy



Acts of Kindness 2011

Birds-eye view of the installation at Martin Place

Photo: Paul Green. Copyright Michael Landy



Acts of Kindness 2011
Two of the 200 stories installed in Sydney's CBD
Photo: Paul Green. Copyright Michael Landy

WORLD EVENTS

December 2010 to January 2011

The most widespread flooding disaster in the history Queensland occurred when the Toowoomba and Lockyer Valley regions were severely affected by floodwaters on 10 January. This would later lead to flooding in the Ipswich and Brisbane regions.

21 January

MONA, the Museum of Old and New Art, opened on the Berriedale Peninsula in Hobart, Tasmania. Financed by the controversial Tasmanian philanthropist David Walsh, it houses his hundred million dollar private collection.

The Arab Spring

Civil unrest erupted throughout many countries in the Middle East and North Africa where authoritarian rule dominated for decades.

17 December 2010

Following Mohamed Bouazizi's dramatic protest against severe conditions of unemployment and corruption in Tunisia, his fellow countrymen revolted and drove out their repressive ruler Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali on 14 January 2011.

11 February 2011

Hundreds of thousands gathered in Cairo's Tahrir Square and other sites in Egypt to protest against President Hosni Mubarak's repressive thirty-year rule. Egyptians were galvanised to demonstrate over issues of police brutality, the state of emergency laws, lack of free elections and freedom of speech, uncontrollable corruption, high unemployment, inflated food prices and low minimum wages. 846 lost their lives at the hands of Mubarak's police and militias, but ultimately Hosni Mubarak was forced to surrender and resign.

Revolts in Libya followed when ruler Muammar Gaddafi launched his army against his own people, with fatalities said to exceed 30,000.

11 March 2011

A 9.1 magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami hit the east of Japan, killing over 15,000 and leaving another 8,000 missing. Four nuclear power plants were affected by the quake.

April 2011

WikiLeaks began publishing 779 secret files relating to prisoners detained in the Guantanamo Bay detention camp.

3 April 2011

The Chinese artist and dissident Ai Weiwei is arrested and detained and his studio sealed off by the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) during an apparent crackdown by the regime on activists and dissidents. The PRC government later stated that Weiwei was being held under investigation for his economic crimes.

22 June 2011

The Chinese legal authorities release Ai Weiwei on bail after three months detention on alleged charges of tax evasion. His incarceration was widely viewed as an attempt to silence a prominent critic while authorities had time to decide on the legal grounds for prosecution. Ai Weiwei's detention prompted condemnation of the Chinese government from many corners of the globe. According to China's Foreign Ministry, he is prohibited from leaving Beijing without permission for one year. After his release Ai Weiwei declined to give interviews stating that he is not permitted to discuss the incarceration.

2 May 2011

Navy SEALs in Pakistan succeed in their top-secret mission to kill Osama bin Laden.

21 July 2011

Space Shuttle Atlantis lands successfully at Kennedy Space Center concluding NASA's space program.

22 July 2011

76 people are killed in twin terrorist attacks in Norway after a bombing in the Regjeringskvartalet (Oslo government centre) and a shooting at a political youth camp on the island of Utøya.

26 July 2011

Australian artist and patron Margaret Olley dies at the age of 88.

August 2011

Apple launches its wireless storage system iCloud.

11 September 2011

10th anniversary of the attack on the World Trade Centre, New York

6 October 2011

Steve Jobs, founder of Apple and creator of the MacBook, the iPod, iPhone and the iPad dies.

21 October 2011

Muammar Gaddafi was captured and killed by Libyans in his hometown of Sirte on the Mediterranean following 42 years of one-man rule.

CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

ACTS OF KINDNESS

Each class is divided into small collaborative groups of 'artists'. Give each group a name.

On an A3 sheet of paper, each group is to draw an aerial map in colour of a selected section of the school.

The coloured map is then to be laminated by the teacher. If the school doesn't have a laminator it could be covered with clear contact on the back and front.

The laminated map drawing is to be cut into large puzzle pieces.

Using permanent markers the students are to write one 'act of kindness' in the centre of each puzzle piece.

MARKET STALL

Set up a market stall in your playground at recess selling your act of kindness puzzle pieces.

Each person 'buying' the act of kindness must perform that act for someone in a class or in the school that they do not know well.

Once the act of kindness gesture has been performed, the giver of the act is to take their puzzle piece to a designated wall space where the overall puzzle is to be displayed. Gradually the pieces of the map will be put back to form the completed puzzle.

CITY OF FAME – CONTEMPORARY CITY

On paper, draw a map of your local area. Using coloured markers and felt-tipped pens, mark the map with different points of interest (POIs) using a variety of text and images.

Your map could indicate any of the following:

- Famous artists in your area
- Famous people
- Famous buildings
- Unique historical places of interest
- Areas of historical or contemporary Indigenous interest

ART BIN

Using oil pastels, design and make some brightly coloured gift-wrapping paper. Base your gift-wrapping paper design on a series of drawings of your favourite possessions.

Cover a bin in your classroom with your gift-wrapping paper.

Over a period of one week at the start of each day, you are to place one of your most treasured possessions into the 'Art Bin'.

Using felt pens and collage create one small A4 mixed-media drawing. Begin your mixed-media work by drawing in detail and from memory only, the treasured possession you have placed into the 'Art Bin' that day. Surrounding, intersecting and overlapping this detailed drawing, create a series of lines, shapes, patterns and colours which record the emotional responses you experience throughout the day as you survive without that particular precious possession.

At the conclusion of the week, exhibit all five A4 mixed-media drawings together. Ask the following questions: which possession elicited the strongest emotional response from you? Which possession did you happily manage without?

When observing all the drawings produced by the class throughout that week, list the objects that the class as a whole missed the most. Examine how this was expressed so succinctly in their drawings. Was it the use of line, the choice of colours or the structure of the patterns?

CITY OF FAME – HISTORICAL CITY

Divide the class into groups. Each group is to be issued with a specific city and time period. Some examples could include:

- Arnhem Land – 2000s
- Shanghai – 1990s
- Beijing – 1980s
- London – 1970s
- New York – 1960s
- Paris – 1890s
- Rome – 1500s

Students are to create a hand-drawn map of their chosen city during a specific time period. They will then annotate their map with drawings, texts and images of sites where renowned artists either resided, exhibited or studied.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

In 2008 the contemporary Chinese artist Ai Weiwei developed a blog site where he publicly listed the names of each and every student killed when their school building collapsed during a devastating earthquake in Sichuan. His action globally shamed the Chinese government highlighting their lack of care and poor building codes. In 2009 after Ai Weiwei successfully listed over 5,000 student names the Chinese authorities closed down the blog preventing Ai Weiwei's work from continuing.

Michael Landy, like Ai Weiwei, uses his artistic practice to explore issues of 'self' and 'other'. In *Acts of Kindness* Landy uses the internet to collect local stories concerning the way in which people anonymously display gestures of compassion and generosity in a busy city environment. These stories form the basis for his installation in the centre of a pedestrian plaza in Sydney.

Analyse the way in which the conceptual practices of both these artists explore issues of 'self' and 'other'.

The concept of the map plays a dominant role in the work of Michael Landy's *Acts of Kindness*, 2011 and Mona Hartoum's *Suspendu*, 2009-2010. Both artists have imbued their maps with a great deal of symbolism. Discuss the role symbolism plays in their artmaking.

In his work *Acts of Kindness*, 2011, Michael Landy investigates the hundreds of silent, anonymous, acts of kindness which occur everyday in a bustling city. The Colombian artist Doris Salcedo also investigates hidden relationships within a city, referencing the ghettos of Los Angeles in her work *Plegaria Muda (Silent Prayer)*. After years of research, Salcedo discovered that over a twenty-year period in this marginalised area 10,000 people became victims to their gangland killers. In *Plegaria Muda (Silent Prayer)*, 2010, she creates an installation acknowledging these victims and draws parallels to the thousands of victims of the political murders which occur annually in her country. The work examines the relationships between the murdered and murderer.

With reference to the two artworks above, examine the artists' intentions and analyse the way they reflect the values of their world.

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