

# ASAD RAZA ABSORPTION STORE

ASAD RAZA  
3-19 MAY 2019

# HOW TO USE THIS EDUCATION KIT

This resource is designed to help students and educators understand and engage with the themes and concepts of Kaldor Public Art Project 34: Asad Raza, *Absorption*. The kit comprises an overview of the project, Asad Raza's practice, historical and contextual framework, classroom questions and activities, along with a glossary of key terms and list of references for further reading. The material in this kit has been developed in accordance with the Australian Curriculum, and is suitable for students in Visual Arts stages 2–6, with further cross-curriculum links to geography, history, science, Aboriginal studies and design and technology. Available for free download on the Kaldor Public Art Projects website, the kit may be used to support a school visit to the project, or as a stand-alone resource.

Teachers are encouraged to adapt activities to suit students' needs or to integrate areas of this resource into existing classroom units of study. Focus questions and activities are included to stimulate discussion and critical thinking by students, and to lead to a deeper investigation of the issues raised.

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Kaldor Public Art Projects acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which this project is presented. We pay our respect to the Gadigal of the Eora Nation and to their Elders, past and present, and through them to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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# PROJECT OVERVIEW

Kaldor Public Art Projects and Carriageworks present Asad Raza's *Absorption*, at The Clothing Store, on the Carriageworks site, Eveleigh, Sydney, from 3–19 May 2019. The project represents the 34<sup>th</sup> Kaldor Public Art Project, and is the first work presented by the artist in Australia.

The site-specific work completely occupies the Clothing Store building, with the full expanse of the building's concrete floor coated with dense layers of soil, weighing a total of almost 300 tonnes. To develop the scientific elements of the project, Raza has worked in collaboration with the Sydney Institute of Agriculture, led by Professor Alex McBratney and his colleague Associate Professor Stephen Cattle.

Within this environment, Raza has invited a number of artists to create interventions, taking the form of installations, performances or experiments, and focusing on dialogue and collaboration. Contributing artists include Daniel Boyd, Chun Yin Rainbow Chan, Megan Alice Clune, Dean Cross, Brian Fuata, Agatha Gothe-Snape, Jana Hawkins-Andersen, Khaled Sabsabi and Ivey Wawn. Along with these artist interventions, a number of 'cultivators' are present at all times throughout the exhibition, acting as custodians and caretakers of the soil and prompting informal conversations with visitors.

The resulting project is a network of interacting living organisms and non-living materials, which will continue to change, develop and grow over time. This process of constant evolution is characteristic of Asad Raza's artistic practice. His projects are often open-ended and subject to change, and their outcomes are never completely pre-determined. The experience of *Absorption* will be different for every visitor.

Asad Raza's installation makes unexpected use of soil as both literal floor and primary artistic material. While soil is the basis of all human life, it is rarely considered or talked about in our daily lives. As Alfred E. Hartemink says: "There is great beauty in the soil and although humankind may not overwhelmingly realise the importance of soil, there is potential to enhance its appreciation through the arts."<sup>[1]</sup>

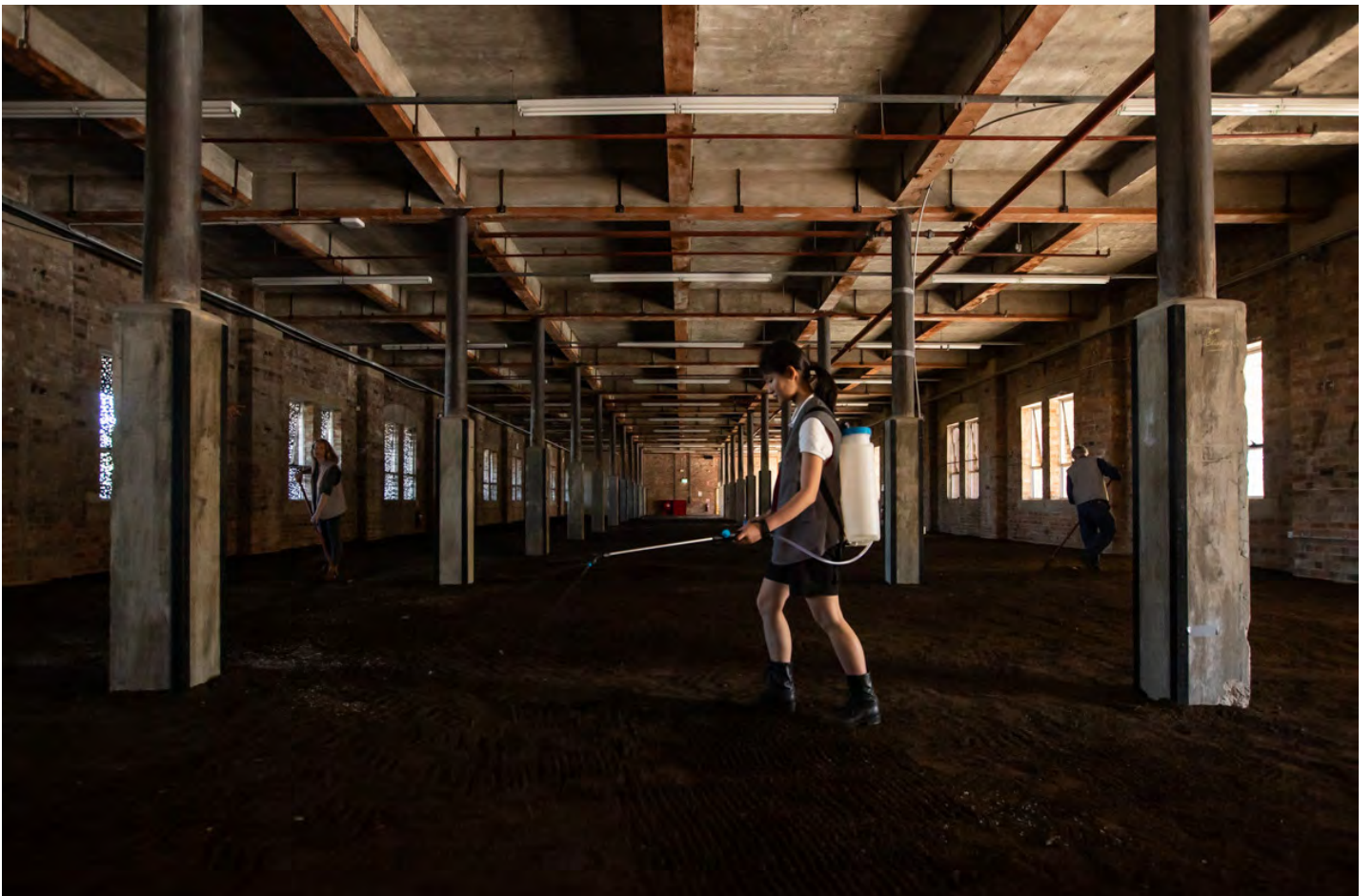
Soil is the upper layer of the earth's surface in which vegetation grows, water is stored, and in which can be found numerous organisms, such as animals, plants, fungi and bacteria. Its complex composition and texture can vary depending on its location, but always includes minerals, liquids and organic matter. Sand, clay and loam are some of the different soil types that are found across the world.

Serving as a source of food production and as a filter for drinking water, soil is fundamental to all life. Unsurprisingly, given that it is so crucial to human survival, soil has acquired countless symbolic and cultural meanings. To develop the 34<sup>th</sup> Kaldor Public Art Project, Asad Raza worked closely with Professor McBratney and his colleagues at the Sydney Institute of Agriculture to create a new soil mixture, or neosoil. Their work focused on varying the components of the soil to cultivate specific properties, including the ability to react and absorb elements, in order to improve its productive capacity.

*Absorption*, the title chosen for the project, gives a sense of the constantly changing and evolving nature of the work. In a scientific sense, absorption refers to the process of something absorbing, assimilating or soaking up another substance—as in the absorption of water and nutrients by the soil. Figuratively speaking, absorption can also be understood as the complete occupation of the mind—as when someone is thoroughly immersed or engrossed in their work. The title *Absorption* suggests an act of transformation, of moving from one state to another, of incorporating new materials or ideas, with no pre-determined outcome. With Kaldor Public Art Project 34, Asad Raza aims to create a new and fertile ground—an environment for artists and audiences to be immersed, collaborate, and produce meaning and substance.

[1.] Alfred E. Hartemink, "Foreword" in Alexandra Toland, Jay Stratton Noller, Gerd Wessolek, *Field to Palette, Dialogues on Soil and Art in the Anthropocene*, Boca Raton, London and New York, CRC Press, 2018.





[Above]: Kaldor Public Art Project 34: Asad Raza, *Absorption*, 2019. The Clothing Store, Carriageworks. Photograph: Pedro Greig.

[Below]: Kaldor Public Art Project 34: Asad Raza, *Absorption*, 2019. The Clothing Store, Carriageworks. Photograph: Pedro Greig.







[Above]: Kaldor Public Art Project 34: Asad Raza, *Absorption*, 2019. The Clothing Store, Carriageworks. Photograph: Pedro Greig.

[Below]: Kaldor Public Art Project 34: Asad Raza, *Absorption*, 2019. The Clothing Store, Carriageworks. Photograph: Pedro Greig.



# ASAD RAZA: ARTIST'S PRACTICE

## BIOGRAPHY

*Defining yourself through a job isn't satisfying, and actually I think it's crucial for people to get away from defining their usefulness in terms of jobs.*<sup>[2]</sup> – Asad Raza

Asad Raza was born in 1974, in Buffalo, New York, and is currently based in New York and Berlin. Of Pakistani background, he studied literature and film-making at Johns Hopkins University and New York University, then worked as a writer, sports journalist and political organiser, before shifting his focus to contemporary art.

*I studied different things and eventually I worked with artists, and I liked the art world because people did their own thing, stupid or not. After a while, I found I was having more and more thoughts of my own, and had to find a way to realise them.*<sup>[3]</sup> – Asad Raza

Raza's work challenges a conventional understanding of art in blurring the established boundaries between disciplines. He describes his exhibitions as "metabolisms" or zones of activity, in which he works with experiences, human and non-human beings, and objects. His artistic practice is multifaceted, and comprises the roles of artist, curator, dramaturge, editor, producer and director.

*What I do is to propose some...mixed-up experiences. I think of them as metabolic systems where humans, their games, animals, minerals, plants, and objects are all playing a part.*<sup>[4]</sup> – Asad Raza

In relation to Kaldor Public Art Project 34, this chapter outlines three key aspects of Asad Raza's practice: his multidisciplinary and collaborative approach, his exploration of the concept of 'inhabitation', and his focus on audience participation and engagement.



[Above]: Asad Raza, Sydney, 2019.  
Photograph: Michael Waite.

[2.] Asad Raza, quoted in Maurizio Cattelan and Marta Papini, "Art Is Like a Vampire. Interview with Asad Raza" in *Flash Art International*, n° 319, March–April 2018.

[3.] Ibid.

[4.] Ibid.

# ASAD RAZA: ARTIST'S PRACTICE

## MULTIDISCIPLINARY AND COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

*The idea of disciplinarity is something that was very powerful in the last 150 years, and modernism is built out of fragmenting the senses into different expertise areas. The problem with that is it's boring for the people who do it. It also leads to products that don't have a holistic nature.*<sup>[5]</sup> – Asad Raza

Asad Raza's art practice is both collaborative and multidisciplinary, often involving ideas or teams of people from across several different disciplines or fields of study. This holistic approach has the potential to generate new knowledge, new modes of working and new understandings of the role of artist and audience.

In December 2015, Raza presented *home show*, an intimate exhibition held in his tiny one-bedroom apartment in New York City. Artists, curators, friends and family were invited to collaborate by intervening directly in Raza's life. Artist Sophia al-Maria's intervention took the form of a ritual, performed daily by Raza, which involved clogging the bathtub drain with her hair. Rachel Rose instructed him to make his bed with Star Wars-themed bedspreads, artefacts from his own childhood. Adrián Villar Rojas crafted a striking installation of food and drink in the freezer, while Carsten Höller created a series of toothpastes, designed to induce dreams. Alongside these interventions were objects from Raza's family and personal history, such as an artificial heart pump used by his surgeon father, and a perfume created by his sister. Raza himself gave personal tours to every visitor over the course of the four-week exhibition.

*Art is very competitive and there are constant status measurements happening. So I try to undo that by collaborating and helping others, to calm the competitive anxieties. Those moments when you can try to let it be calm are better. Things can come through the channel easier.*<sup>[6]</sup> – Asad Raza



[Above]: Asad Raza, *home show*, 2015, New-York. Adrián Villar Rojas, *Untitled*, 2015.

[5.]      *ibid.*  
[6.]      *ibid.*



# ASAD RAZA: ARTIST'S PRACTICE

## INHABITATION

Many of Asad Raza's projects are site-specific, meaning that they are created for a particular site, often in direct response to the physical conditions or layers of historical meaning surrounding the space.

Through these site-specific works, Raza aims to set up active relationships between the experiences, living beings and objects that are present within or 'inhabit' the site.

*Inhabitation is an interesting lens to me. It suggests an active relationship between a place and an artwork living there.*

*Inhabitation can also mean to add life. Nineteenth-century museums were open to the public, an important democratic innovation, but they introduced a sense of policing and distance, a "look but don't touch" atmosphere that made art colder and more disembodied. An exhibition inhabited by life tries to make public space behave more like an inhabited home.<sup>[7]</sup> – Asad Raza*

Raza's 2017 work *Untitled (Plot for dialogue)* was set within a 16<sup>th</sup> century church in Milan, Italy, in which visitors were invited to play tennis on a specially constructed tennis court.

Responding to the site of the church, which was no longer in use for worship, Raza explored the concepts of cult and devotion, and the practice of meditating. He considered the act of warming up for a tennis match as a kind of dialogue. While the work contained striking imagery – the bright orange court in contrast to the richly decorated church, with statues in the place of umpires, and an urn of iced tea on the altar – it had the effect of creating an intimate and productive space, inhabited by both performers and visitors. As Raza explains:

*The key was the coaches, who were young tennis players we found in Milan. They approached the visitors and explained that the idea was to meditate by hitting the ball back and forth. The visitors would say, "No, I'm just here to see the piece." And the coaches would coax them, and then another transformation could happen. The visitors became inhabitants, too. Playing with the coaches, hitting the ball, and then drinking the tea, and watching others do it made them feel at home. It became a hangout.<sup>[8]</sup> – Asad Raza*



[Above]: Asad Raza, *Untitled (plot for dialogue)*, 2017, Converso Gallery, Milan. Photograph: Andrea Rossetti.

[7.] Asad Raza, quoted in Laura McLean-Ferris, "Inhabitation and Dialogue: Asad Raza. Asad Raza in conversation" in *Mousse Magazine*, n°62, February – March 2018. pp.242–247.

(<http://moussemagazine.it/asad-raza-laura-mc-lean-ferris-2018/>).

[8.] *Ibid.*



# ASAD RAZA: ARTIST'S PRACTICE



[Above]: Asad Raza, *Root sequence. Mother tongue*, 2017, artmonte-carlo, Monte Carlo, 2018. Photograph: Haydn Appleby.

## AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

The engagement of the audience is central to Asad Raza's work. He aims to foster new encounters, produce moments of active and participatory dialogue, and explore what the experience of exhibitions can make possible for visitors.

For the 2017 Whitney Biennial, Asad Raza presented *Root Sequence. Mother Tongue*, a mini-forest of twenty-six trees of different species installed in the gallery space. Integral to the work was a group of 'caretakers', whose primary role was to care for the living plants and to interact directly with visitors – answering questions about the trees or simply engaging in conversation. Over the course of the exhibition, the trees' natural progressive stages of leafing and blooming were apparent. The active engagement of the audience with the exhibition emerged as a complex network of interactions between growing plants, their human counterparts and the environment.

*Witnessing an activity and doing that same activity are very linked for us – in the brain they are almost the same thing – so I try to create situations where you do both: you see something happening, and you do it. And you realise that what you put yourself next to, and what you are, are the same.*<sup>[9]</sup> – Asad Raza

*Absorption* represents the latest development in Asad Raza's multidisciplinary and collaborative practice. To create the 34<sup>th</sup> Kaldor Public Art Project, he has collaborated closely with experts from across the disciplines of art, science, agriculture and architecture to transform The Clothing Store into a multi-sensory environment.

A group of dedicated 'cultivators' inhabit this space, enacting daily rituals and processes of mixing, watering and testing, as they work to create a new and enriched soil. Raza invites audiences to become part of this complex living system. Rather than just observing the work, visitors are encouraged to actively engage by walking on, smelling and touching the soil. Taking the soil away for their own uses, they allow *Absorption* to grow and be nurtured beyond the Clothing Store.

[9.] Asad Raza, quoted in Maurizio Cattelan and Marta Papini, "Art Is Like a Vampire. Interview with Asad Raza" in *Flash Art International*, n° 319, March – April 2018.

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## ART AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

In recent decades, we have witnessed the emergence of new art practices which focus primarily on human interactions and social relations. These diverse practices, often categorised as social practice, relational art or participatory art, reflect a broader cultural shift away from the production of material objects, towards ideas of process, transformation, participation and experience. While differing in their themes, concepts and materials, these practices share one common denominator – they depend above all on the active involvement and engagement of the audience.

Rirkrit Tiravanija (born 1961 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, lives New York)

In the 1990's, French curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud coined the term 'relational aesthetics', which he defined as, "A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."<sup>[10]</sup> Rather than focusing on a material object, the artist creates a social environment in which people participate in a shared activity. Often requiring the audience to work together as a community, relational art can serve to reconnect people with their surroundings, and with each other.

Rirkrit Tiravanija is among the artists cited by Bourriaud as influential figures in the development of relational art. Tiravanija is widely known for creating convivial living spaces in an art context, in which he aims to engage all the senses that are not usually called upon in the art gallery. In an attempt to address the social, cultural and psychological fragmentation that has resulted from rapid technological change and globalisation, these projects produce temporary communities built around discussion, ritual and social interaction. Works such as *Untitled (free/still)* (1992/1995/2007/2011-) involve the communal preparation and consumption of meals by the audience. Rather than passive viewers, the audience members become active participants in the on-going creation of an artwork. Tiravanija's work questions the role of the audience and challenges our expectations of an artwork, its form and its status; blurring the boundaries between life and art.



## THE EXHIBITION AS A CREATIVE MEDIUM

Within contemporary artistic practice and theory, the focus on the experience and engagement of audiences has extended to the format of the exhibition, which is increasingly seen as a creative medium in itself.

The interest in exhibition-making as a form of artistic creation emerged in France in the 1990s, among a generation of artists and curators who had become disillusioned with the conventional exhibition format of the 1980s, which they saw as increasingly commercialised, and functioning as little more than a "mere showroom" for art objects.<sup>[11]</sup> This loosely defined group includes artists Philippe Parreno, Dominique Gonzales-Foerster and Pierre Huyghe, and curators such as Éric Troncy. Rather than a traditional curator, Troncy positions himself as a collaborator, facilitator or co-author working alongside artists. He contrasts the conventional exhibition format, which typically brings together a selection of finished works according to a prescribed theme, to an artistic 'project', which he defines as open-ended, unfolding over time and "an experiment whose outcome [is] altogether uncertain."<sup>[12]</sup> Some of these experimental tactics include changing the appearance or layout of the exhibition throughout its duration, or intervening in exhibition communications – such as written pamphlets or audio guides.

Through this exhibition-production process, artists re-invent spaces, their structures and their rules. The production of objects – such as paintings or sculptures – is secondary to the aim of creating whole new "worlds" for the audience to occupy and experience. These "performative exhibitions"<sup>[13]</sup> reflect an awareness of the complex and intricate relationships between artists, audiences and institutions, and in turn create their own dynamic social and cultural networks.

[Left]: Rirkrit Tiravanija, *untitled (free)*, 1992, 303 Gallery, New York. Courtesy of the artist, Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York/Rome and 303 Gallery, New York.

[10.] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Paris: Les Presses du Réel, 2002, p.113.

[11.] Eric Troncy, quoted in Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London and New York: Verso, 2012, p. 207.

[12.] Ibid.

[13.] Bishop, 2012, pp. 207-215.



# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Philippe Parreno (born 1964 in Oran, Algeria)

French artist Philippe Parreno is recognised as a key figure working in this vein of exhibition-producers. For Parreno, an exhibition is not a selection of individual works, but a comprehensive and immersive experience. Rather than a conventional visual arts vocabulary, he embraces dramaturgic and choreographic methods – altering the architecture of the gallery space and using theatrical settings to orchestrate light, sound, moving image and objects. Exploring the concepts of duration and time, Parreno writes scenarios involving an unfolding succession of events. His projects aim to prompt new configurations and situations for the audience to discover.

In his exhibition *Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World* (2013-14), presented at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, Philippe Parreno encouraged visitors to embark on an art adventure, in which they moved through rooms by pushing on a rotating bookcase, while automated pianos played *Petrushka* by Igor Stravinsky. As the exhibition changed and evolved over time, viewers were required to demonstrate an extraordinary level of patience and curiosity in order to experience its full potential.



[Above]: Exhibition view, Philippe Parreno, *Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of the World*, Palais de Tokyo, 2013. Liam Gillick, *Factories in the snow*, 2007. Courtesy of the artist. Photograph: Aurélien Mole.



[Above]: Exhibition view, Philippe Parreno, *Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of the World*, Palais de Tokyo, 2013. Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, *La Bibliothèque clandestine*, 2013. Courtesy of the artist. Photograph: Aurélien Mole.

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE HUMAN AND THE NON-HUMAN

*"I can say that I'm currently pursuing this interest – in how do you bring the lives of non-human living beings into relation with humans in the context of art."<sup>[14]</sup>*

These socially engaged and participatory practices reflect an awareness of the complex and interdependent relationships between artists, audiences and institutions. Similarly, in the face of accelerating technological development and climate change, artists such as Pierre Huyghe and Asad Raza are seeking to explore the interdependence of human and non-human entities, and the impact of human intervention on the environment.

Throughout the modern era, Western philosophy and science has been dominated by the binary opposition (or dichotomy) between culture and nature – the distinction between the human-made and the so-called “natural” world. This understanding of the world can be defined as anthropocentric, in that humans are considered separate from and superior to all else.

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the revision of anthropocentrism in favour of a more biocentric worldview was influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* (1882), in which the philosopher defines humankind as a species integrated within its environment. The origins of biocentrism can, however, be found in a number of spiritual and religious traditions which hold that all life has value, such as Buddhism.

The term non-human refers to living or even non-living things, such as robots, which have significant human-like characteristics, particularly the capacity for intelligence. Technological advances in artificial intelligence, along with growing awareness of animal intelligence, pose further challenges to the anthropocentric worldview.

Artists such as Pierre Huyghe explore these ideas through concepts such as agency, hybridity and porosity. What does it mean to be human in an era of artificial intelligence? Do all intelligent beings possess individual agency (the power to act and make decisions)? Is a hybrid form considered both artificial and natural, or somehow “in-between”? If an ecosystem is a network of living things, such as plants, and non-living things, such as wind and sunlight, is there a defined boundary between the living and the non-living? Or are these boundaries permeable and porous?

[14.] Asad Raza, quoted in *Rolls-Royce Art Programme: Root Sequence. Mother Tongue* by Asad Raza, at the Rockbund Art Museum in Shanghai, 5 November 2018. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shL03GCiYbE>).

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



[Above]: Pierre Huyghe, *A Forest of Lines*, 2008, at Sydney Opera House, 16<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney (18 June 2008–7 September 2008).

Pierre Huyghe (born 1962 in Paris, France)

*"I don't want to exhibit something to someone, but rather the reverse: to exhibit someone to something."*<sup>[15]</sup> – Pierre Huyghe

French artist Pierre Huyghe is known for his diverse body of works exploring the perspectives and intelligences of non-human agents, such as animals, plants or computers. He sees himself as an investigator and thinks of his exhibitions as living environments or ecosystems. Rather than attempting to control the outcome of his works, he sets them up to function as complex and self-organising networks. Made up of multiple interconnecting and interdependent parts, including living organisms, computer-generated data and the interaction of audiences, the exhibitions can grow and change in unpredictable ways.

In 2008, for the 16<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney, Pierre Huyghe created a temporary forest in the Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House. For one day and night, the entire room was filled with mist and thousands of living trees, while instructions on how to exit the space could be heard

in a melody composed by British singer Laura Marling. Inside this monumental and iconic building, the audience was invited to walk through the space and immerse themselves in the ecosystem. This piece, titled *A Forest of Lines*, acted as a kind of "in-between" world, incorporating nature and culture, human and non-human, living and non-living entities. Through this work, Huyghe effectively explored the potential of the exhibition format to create imagined or speculative realities, that in turn allow us to imagine new possibilities for the planet.

[15.] Pierre Huyghe, quoted in *Umwelt*, 2018-9, Serpentine Galleries, London. (<https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/pierre-huyghe-umwelt>).



# DIRT → SOIL → EARTH: THE ART OF BUILDING LIFE

## BY LUCAS IHLEIN

Living in cities, we rarely think about what lies beneath the concrete and bitumen of our freeways and footpaths. But every so often a burst pipe summons the emergency repair crew, and jackhammers smash up the road. If we're lucky to be there at just the right moment, we might witness rapidly growing piles of a gritty brownish matter heaped up on the verge: dirt.

Dirt is useful. You can mound it up, scrape it away, level it off. It's a malleable building material, helping engineers solve drainage problems. Tamp it down hard to create the solid base for a new apartment block. Sink cement pilings into it and span a bridge across a wide harbour. Dirt is indispensable for making all this urban infrastructure. But one of the things you can't do very easily with dirt is grow plants in it. For that you need soil.

What's the difference? Well, dirt is basically dead soil. Or to put it back to front: if you want to make soil, take the mixture of tiny particles that constitute dirt (sand, rock, clay etc) and breathe life into them with organic matter. Dead bits of plants and animals (leaves, roots, poo) layered on top of the dirt break down and bind themselves to it, and soil formation has begun. A seed dropped by a passing bird will start to germinate – fertilised by bird poo! – and as the seedling grows, its roots push down into the dirt, opening

space underground, making way for air and water to infiltrate. Fungus finds dead organic matter to feed on. Worms move in. Bacteria feeds voraciously on the whole lot. It doesn't take long for an ecosystem teeming with microbes to emerge, almost invisibly, under your feet. It's this living community that transforms dirt into soil.

Another word for living soil is humus. It's no accident that this word shares a common root with human. Without the equation dirt+life=soil, there would be no human life on this planet. Without humus, there would be no farms perched on the outskirts of our cities providing the food we need to keep our families alive. Soil is the hidden ingredient in every hamburger we munch, every lettuce leaf we crunch, every glass of juice we slurp. Soil is woven into the fabric of our cotton jeans, and knitted into the yarn of our woollen jumpers.

Soil is the principal resource upon which civilisations thrive. Nature, in her ever-generous way, creates soil for us, inch by inch, over thousands of years, a living blanket covering the surface of the earth. And yet, like so many natural resources at our disposal, human societies have been mining soil – removing it faster than it can replace itself. How do we do this? Our societies create demand for very large yields from a very small range of species.



[Above]: Farmer John Sweet inspecting soil from the Watershed Land Art Project (WLAP), at the Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens, January 2019.

# DIRT → SOIL → EARTH: THE ART OF BUILDING LIFE

## BY LUCAS IHLEIN

Faced with such demand, we respond by growing monocultures, by ploughing, by applying chemical fertilisers, and by spraying poisons on weeds and pests. These ordinary agricultural processes break up the living ecosystems in soil, diminishing organic matter, changing rich soil back to ordinary lifeless dirt.

Unlike good soil, dirt can't bind itself together. Faced with a heavy shower of rain, dirt erodes. Crops grown in poor soil require more chemicals and tillage to produce a viable yield, creating more erosion, and so the cycle continues. The dried-out, unproductive landscapes you can witness throughout Australia are the results of mining soil. Since the end of the last ice age, human civilisations have repeatedly mined their soils to the point where they can no longer support thriving populations. Degraded land is abandoned, new forests are cleared for farming, and on it goes.

Currently, our commercial food production and distribution systems demand efficiency of scale: massive crops which after harvesting are gathered together in enormous silos and shipped around the world as commodities. Such economies cannot afford to tolerate plant diversity. Anything apart from the target species is vilified as a "weed" and eliminated at all costs. Animals are often kept in feedlots separate from the crops they eat. But when we exclude animals and diverse plant species from our farming systems, the price we pay is the loss of soil.

What can we do to slow and reverse this process? Fortunately, nature has created a template we can emulate and adapt. Never in nature do we see monocultures. Rather, lots of different plants grow together, amongst and alongside each other, and in sequence with each other. This process is replicated below ground, where the roots of all those plants interact with the soil organisms to foster vast biodiverse communities. Nature doesn't exclude animals from its landscapes either. Before broadacre agriculture took over, grass eaters like bison moved through prairies in nomadic herds, eating everything in their path, dropping manure as they went, continuing the cycling of organic matter and nutrients, and contributing to the endless task of building soil. Insects followed, pollinating, eating and helping to decompose animal droppings, becoming protein themselves for birds, frogs, fish. As life flourishes, soil flourishes.

We could describe soil within such flourishing landscapes as earth. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is also the name we have given our planet! It's now time to celebrate the work of those farmers who, as custodians of the land, make it their life's work to emulate natural systems, feeding and clothing us and also, importantly, building earth, regenerating the abundance of biological diversity that has been in decline for so long.

### LUCAS IHLEIN

Lucas Ihlein is an artist and ARC DECRA Research Fellow at University of Wollongong. He is a student at Kandos School of Cultural Adaptation (KSCA), whose current project is called "An artist, a farmer and a scientist walk into a bar...". Since 2014, Lucas has been collaborating with artist Kim Williams, farmer Simon Mattsson, and a host of community members to grow a crop of regenerative sugarcane at the Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens in North Queensland. Many of the ideas about soil in this text come from Simon Mattsson's Nuffield Scholarship report *Making the Most of Your Soil's Biological Potential* (2016) as well as the book *Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations* (2012) by David R. Montgomery.

See <http://ksca.land> and <http://lucasihleinandart.net> for more ideas about land, soil and art.



# WORKSHOP OVERVIEW BY ALICE HEYWARD



[Above]: Artists participating in workshop with Asad Raza, The Clothing Store, Carriageworks, Sydney, 2019. Courtesy of Felix Media. Image: Kate Blackmore.

The workshop facilitated by Asad Raza as research for his project at The Clothing Store brought together a diverse group of artists working across various disciplines to contemplate exchange. How can we conceive live encounters between those who visit an exhibition and those who host the exhibition?

We spent four days together in the shadowy, columned interiors of The Clothing Store, which was once a factory for making and distributing workers' uniforms, adjacent to Eveleigh Railway tracks. We spent a lot of time in a circle talking – the cavernous industrial hall of exposed brick extending around us. Its history resonated. I had the ghostly sense of many sweaty workers in here, wiping grease on their uniforms collected from the change rooms above us. Those rooms are now dedicated to artist studios, whose residents were part of our workshop group.

These artists had either just moved in upstairs, or were in the process of doing so. It was exciting to think that our brief time together would initiate their year-long residency on site. Since there was no clear outcome for our workshop, I could imagine other occasions of artists coming together here in the future, following our gathering. These projections pressed against my imagination of the past, of the rituals that must have taken place in here through repetitive manual labour. Sydney's summer heat would have weighed

heavily on the workers' bodies in the factory and on the tracks. It melted down upon us as we performed thought and movement experiments on exchange and synchronicity. Loosely guided by Asad, we moved through simple activities based around his interests in an exhibition composed of interactions. From breathing together to spoken exchanges, we were busy with what formed and transformed between our bodies. We sang an abstracted passage from Heidegger's *Discourse on Thinking*, and performed group movement scores. One of these scores was inspired by the 'three body problem': the negotiation of force between the sun, the moon and Earth. Our task here was to sustain an average distance between us all moving simultaneously, gradually increasing and decreasing our collective speed.



# WORKSHOP OVERVIEW BY ALICE HEYWARD

In each activity, whether focussed on the body, speech or movements in space, the kinds of exchanges we practised were contingent on the relations between us. They were generated by simple sets of rules that, once materialised, produced rich complexity. They brought about different experiences of time, without fixed duration or linearity.

In smaller groups, we devised other activities to further speculate on exchanges with visitors at imaginary exhibitions in this site. The curious problems that arose for me were about the idea of co-dependency. How to facilitate situations that only emerge through the engagement with visitors? How to navigate politics of participation? It was illuminating to think about 'co-dependency' in this context, apart from its recognised definition as a one-sided reliance of one body on another in human relationships. I thought about 'co-dependency' here as a state of allowance for aesthetic experiences between many.

It was refreshing to work in a collective situation with artists who practise very differently from one another, without a hierarchy based on discipline, status or authorship. Although the workshop was connected to Asad's project, it was an independent occasion, with a constellation of people who will not necessarily work here together again – a valuable opportunity to learn through each other, open to our desires towards ideas that arose. It was a stimulating challenge for dancers, choreographers, musicians, writers, visual artists and curators to think together with multiple perspectives.

The soups that we began cooking every day when we met, then ate together at the end of each session, were wonderful experiential metaphors for what artistic and collective practice might look like through these processes: a bunch of different available ingredients transforming together in a container, cared for by a group across time, to be shared and enjoyed. A ritual to keep company to thinking and making together.

# AUSTRALIAN ARTIST COLLABORATORS



Daniel Boyd  
Photograph: Nikki To



Chun Yin Rainbow Chan  
Photograph: Jonno Revanche



Megan Alice Clune



Dean Cross  
Photograph: Janelle Evans

## DANIEL BOYD

Daniel Boyd's practice is internationally recognised for its manifold engagement with the colonial history of the Australia-Pacific region. Boyd has both Aboriginal and Pacific Islander heritage and his work traces this cultural and visual ancestry in relation to the broader history of Western art. Boyd has been exhibiting in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Australia and overseas since 2005.

## CHUN YIN RAINBOW CHAN

Chun Yin Rainbow Chan works across music, performance and installation. Born in Hong Kong and raised in Sydney, Rainbow is interested in mistranslations, diaspora and the effects of globalisation on modern Chinese society. Melding bubbly, textured soundscapes and off-kilter electronics with her pop sensibilities, Rainbow's songs consistently evolve to reflect of her changing ties to desire, memory and space.



Brian Fuata

## MEGAN ALICE CLUNE

Megan Alice Clune shifts between musician, composer and artist. Primarily, her work consists of a dissection of musical elements and contexts through verbal or text-based scores, sound installation and collaboration. Megan has presented work and undertaken residencies across Australia, Europe and North America, including the Bang on a Can Summer Music Festival (MA), Underbelly Arts, Next Wave Festival, Performa 15 (NYC) and Vivid Live at the Sydney Opera House.

## DEAN CROSS

Dean Cross was born and raised on Ngunnawal/Ngambri Country and is of Worimi descent. He is a trans-disciplinary artist primarily working across installation, sculpture and photography. His career began in contemporary dance, performing and choreographing nationally and internationally for over a decade with Australia's leading dance companies.

## BRIAN FUATA

Brian Fuata works in performance through live and mediated forms. He employs various modes of presentation within the framework of structured-improvisation. In Fuata's works, the act of viewing is a reciprocating action between artist and audience and audience with each other. Fuata employs the 'blank sheet' as a recurring motif in his work, which transforms with different contexts into emails, paper, Word.Doc, google.doc, SMS text, concrete, film, and in the case of his 20-minute ghost performances, a white bedsheet.

[CONTINUED ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE]





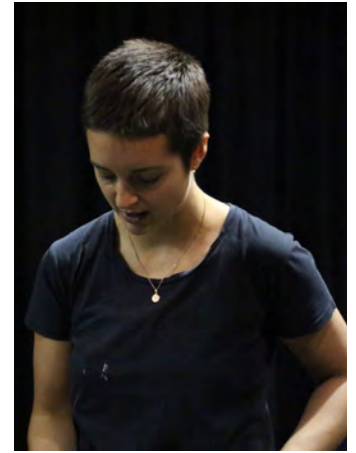
Agatha Gothe-Snape



Jana Hawkins-Andersen



Khaled Sabsabi



Ivey Wawn  
Photo Freya Ludowici

## AGATHA GOTHE-SNAPE

Agatha Gothe-Snape works at the threshold of visual arts and performance. She has a highly trained and deeply attuned understanding of performance strategies and how they intersect not only with the visual but with the relational and architectural. As a result, her works are singular, embracing the complexity, ambiguity and slippages of both performance and language in an aesthetic style that is questioning, poetic and political.

## JANA HAWKINS-ANDERSEN

Jana Hawkins-Andersen is an artist based in Sydney, working in sculpture and ceramics. Through arrangements that display impact, touch and absorption between materials her work focuses on a politics of intimacy and care. Presented as co-dependent, parasitic installations, the work considers the entangled experiences of care and trespass and examines the viewers relationship to complicated objects that contaminate and disrupt.

## KHALED SABSABI

Khaled Sabsabi's process involves working across art mediums, geographical borders and cultures to create immersive and engaging art experiences. He sees art as an effective tool to communicate with people through a familiar language. Sabsabi makes work that questions rationales and complexities of nationhood, identity and change. His practice speaks to audiences in ways that enlighten our understanding of universal dynamics which is more complex and ultimately more unknowable than our own selves.

## IVEY WAWN

Ivey Wawn is an independent artist working between Sydney and Melbourne. Her practice emerges from dance into the choreographic, dealing with systems thinking to build live performance situations for a range of contexts. She was recipient of the DanceWEB Scholarship in 2016, a Responsive Residency through Critical Path in 2018 and the 2019 Performance Space Experimental Choreography Residency.

# SITE: CLOTHING STORE



[Above]: The Clothing Store, Carriageworks, Sydney, 2017. Photograph: Daniel Boud.

The Clothing Store building is located on Gadigal Land in the Eora nation, in what we now know as the inner Sydney area of Redfern/Eveleigh. It was built in 1913 as part of the Eveleigh Railway Workshops, and was originally used to produce, store and dispatch uniforms for the thousands of railway workers who were employed on the site.

The Eveleigh Railway Workshops themselves were built between 1880–1889, and became the largest and most technologically advanced rail engineering complex in the southern hemisphere, covering an area of 51 hectares. The workshops were dedicated to assembling, repairing and maintaining steam locomotives and carriages for use throughout New South Wales, and remained in continuous operation for over a century.

At its peak of production, Eveleigh Railway Workshops was the largest employer in New South Wales. The surrounding areas of Redfern and Darlington were transformed, with large tracts of land developed into workers' housing. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, as Sydney's population swelled, with large numbers of newly arrived European migrants, and Aboriginal people moving from rural areas to the city, the workshops were a valuable source of employment.

The site – and the thousands who worked there as skilled engineers, tradespeople, labourers, painters, cleaners, and administrative and nursing staff – played a major role in the history of labour rights and the struggle for social justice in Australia. In 1917, workers at Eveleigh launched one of the largest industrial actions in Australian history, known as the

'Great Strike'. While only lasting six weeks, the strike spread across New South Wales and Victoria, involving around 98,000 workers, and giving rise to a newly politicised labour force.

Production declined following the introduction of diesel trains, and Eveleigh Railway Workshops closed in 1988. With its large extent of surviving workshops and intact original equipment, it is considered one of the most significant industrial heritage sites in the world. The northern part of the site, the former Eveleigh Carriage Workshops, is now home to Carriageworks, one of the largest contemporary multi-arts centres in Australia.

The Clothing Store building, a 800-square-metre concrete floored space with two central rows of pillars, has remained almost intact since its construction. The building now functions as a collaborative community space, with the upstairs level dedicated to the Clothing Store Artists Studio annual residency program.

With Kaldor Public Art Project 34, Asad Raza has transformed the raw industrial fabric of the site with the addition of soil – a complex network of organic material, minerals and living organisms. He has introduced new processes of production, as the team of cultivators dedicate their labour to improving and taking care of the soil. By bringing the "outside in", Raza explores the systematic replacement of nature by man-made industrial and urban landscapes; and raises questions on the relationship between nature and culture.



# GLOSSARY

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**AGENCY:**

The power of an individual to act and make decisions independently.

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**ANTHROPOCENTRIC:**

Centred around humankind. Human experiences considered as predominant and most important.

---

**BIOCENTRIC:**

Centred in life, all types of life. All living things have inherent value, worth and importance.

---

**COMMODITY:**

A thing, a service or an idea that can be bought and sold.

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**DICHOTOMY:**

A division of two opposed parts.

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**DRAMATURGE:**

An editor or adviser, whose role is to research, adapt and consult on the use of literary texts for theatrical art, opera or film.

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**EORA:**

People from the present-day Sydney area of NSW. Meaning "here" or "from this place" in the Sydney Aboriginal language.

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**FACILITATOR:**

A person who works alongside other people to support or make possible an activity or process.

---

**HYBRID:**

A cross between different races, animal species or vegetal varieties.

---

**INTERVENTION:**

An interaction which changes or disrupts a pre existing situation, being an artwork, the audience or a space.

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**MONOCULTURE:**

The production and cultivation of one single plant or crop.

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**POROSITY:**

State of being permeable, penetrable.

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**SITE-SPECIFIC:**

In its defined particular original position. Synonym: in-situ (Latin term).

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**CROSS-DISCIPLINARY, MULTIDISCIPLINARY, INTERDISCIPLINARY AND TRANS-DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES:**  
While there are important differences of meaning between each of these terms, all essentially refer to an exchange of knowledge or blurring of boundaries between traditional disciplines.

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**CROSS-DISCIPLINARY** refers to understanding one discipline through the perspective of another.

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**MULTIDISCIPLINARY** corresponds to the collaboration of people from different fields, each drawing on their own knowledge.

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**INTERDISCIPLINARY** speaks of the synthesis of approaches and knowledge from diverse disciplines.

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**TRANS-DISCIPLINARY** denotes the creation of a unity of intellectual frameworks beyond the disciplinary perspectives.

Source: Marilyn Stember, "Advancing the Social Sciences Through the Interdisciplinary Enterprise" in *The Social Science Journal*, Volume 28, Issue 1, 1991, pp. 1-14.

# IN THE CLASSROOM

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## SOIL AS ART MATERIAL

STRUCTURAL | CULTURAL | MATERIAL | AUDIENCE

- 1.) Why is soil crucial to supporting life?
- 2.) What social and cultural significance does soil hold for you and your community?
- 3.) Re-imagine a landscape you once experienced that was very rich in flora and fauna. Can you describe that landscape using the different senses? What did it look like? What did it smell like? What did it feel like? Do you think the soil in this environment was rich in minerals and organic matter? Why or why not?
- 4.) There are almost 300 of soil material in *Absorption*. What is the impact of using only one material in such a large quantity in the artwork?

---

## INHABITATION

SITE | PLACE | CULTURAL | AUDIENCE | SUBJECTIVE

- 1.) What does 'inhabitation' mean for the artist Asad Raza?
- 2.) Imagine a space you would like to 'inhabit' as an artist. Why did you chose this space? What would you create in this space? Why? How could you involve the audience/community in your artwork?

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## COLLABORATION & AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

CULTURAL | AUDIENCE | SUBJECTIVE | EXCHANGE

- 1.) Why is collaboration important in art-making?
- 2.) Think of a time when you collaborated with your peers and you achieved something unexpected. What did you produce? What did you learn?
- 3.) To develop Kaldor Public Art Project 34, Asad Raza collaborated not only with other artists, but with a number of scientific experts. Why do you think it was important for Raza to work with a diverse range of people in the creation of *Absorption*?

---

## THE CLOTHING STORE

SITE | PLACE | WORLD | HISTORY | STRUCTURAL | SUBJECTIVE

- 1.) What was The Clothing Store historically used for?
- 2.) Why were the political actions of the people employed at The Clothing Store of national significance?
- 3.) Asad Raza installed soil, a natural occurring material, into a built environment. What is the effect of bringing the "outside world" into an industrial space?

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## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

POSTMODERN | ART HISTORY | WORLD

- 1.) Imagine you were asked to create an installation that featured both human and non-human elements. What materials would you chose? What message would you communicate? How would the audience engage, move through and/or take part in the artwork?
- 2.) Choose a political topic or subject that is important to you – for example, climate change and the environment. Think about what you could do to encourage awareness and positive change in this area. What site would you choose to present your event or artwork? Why did you choose this site? Who will you choose as your collaborators, and why? Illustrate your ideas through drawings, photographs or collages.
- 3.) Artists such as Asad Raza and Pierre Huyghe think of their exhibitions as "networks", "systems" or even "metabolisms". How would you define these terms?
  - a) Networks and systems can be naturally occurring or human-made. Create a list of some different natural and artificial systems that you encounter every day.
  - b) Choose one of these systems and try to identify all the different elements and how they interact. Depict your chosen system in a hand drawn diagram or map.
  - c) Identify some systems that are changing rapidly, or even endangered, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Describe these changes.
  - d) What are some of the different systems that are created within Asad Raza's *Absorption*?
  - e) Write an extended response, discussing how Asad Raza is responding to the environmental concerns and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- 4.) In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, artists such as Philippe Parreno started to curate their own exhibitions.
  - a) Identify an exhibition which you have visited or researched. Who was responsible for curating this exhibition?
  - b) Compare and contrast the roles of artist and curator. What are their usual responsibilities?
  - c) Do you think exhibitions are different if they are curated by artists themselves? Why, or why not? Create a list of advantages and disadvantages for an artist curating their own exhibition.
  - d) Write an extended response, discussing whether the artist or curator is more responsible for the audience's experience of an exhibition.



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Visit the Kaldor Public Art Projects website for more information on all aspects of Project 34: Asad Raza, *Absorption*, including video documentation, photos, blog posts and links to social media.  
[www.kaldorartprojects.org.au](http://www.kaldorartprojects.org.au)

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# ABOUT KALDOR PUBLIC ART PROJECTS



[Above]: Project 1: Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped Coast – One Million Square Feet*, 1968–69, Little Bay, Sydney. Photograph: Harry Shunk.

For half a century, we have worked with some of the world's most esteemed and iconic international artists, including Gilbert & George, Charlotte Moorman & Nam June Paik, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long, Ugo Rondinone, Gregor Schneider, Bill Viola, Urs Fischer, Michael Landy, Thomas Demand, Roman Ondák, Tino Sehgal and Marina Abramović, amongst others. Our temporary projects have had a lasting impact on the cultural landscape and have changed the way the Australian public sees and experiences the art of today.

We continue to commission groundbreaking new works from both overseas and Australian artists. Our projects explore the dynamic relationships between artforms, artists and audiences, and stimulate discussion and debate through exciting, innovative public programs.

Kaldor Public Art Projects is passionate about the importance of art education to a creative culture. We pioneer new ways to connect with diverse audiences through dynamic, accessible programs, innovative resources, and tailored opportunities for students of all ages and backgrounds. Exciting new models of participation and engagement with contemporary art, such as the MOVE series of classroom resources, have been developed in partnership with the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities. *MOVE: Video art in schools* is an invaluable teaching and learning package designed to support the creative arts curriculum in secondary schools. *MOVE Primary: Art in Motion* is a free, comprehensive online resource which can be accessed from the Kaldor Public Art Projects website.

For more information on our education programs and learning resources, visit:

[kaldorartprojects.org.au](http://kaldorartprojects.org.au)



[Above]: Puppy. Project 10: Jeff Koons, *Puppy*, 1995, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. Photograph: Peter Nuchtern.



[Above]: Project 32: Jonathan Jones, *barrangal dyara (skin and bones)*, September 2016, Royal Botanic Garden Sydney. Photograph: Peter Greig.