VCE Studio Arts | Unit 4 | Area of Study 3: Art Industry Contexts

Case study

Under the sun

Reimagining Max Dupain's Sunbaker
About this Education resource

MGA: THE AUSTRALIAN HOME OF PHOTOGRAPHY
MGA EDUCATION RESOURCE

VCE Studio Arts | Unit 4 | Area of Study 3: Art Industry Contexts
Case study Under the sun: Reimagining Max Dupain’s ‘Sunbaker’

© 2017 Monash Gallery of Art, writers and artists as acknowledged

Curriculum focused text and Resource design:
Stephanie Richter, Education & Public Programs Coordinator, MGA.
VCE Studio Arts Study Design excerpts used with permission.
Document prepared with thanks to Kathryn Hendy-Ekers at VCAA for her advice.

Exhibition texts:
Claire Monneraye, Curator, Australian Centre for Photography (ACP)

Installation photographs:
Katie Tremschnig, Registrar, MGA © Monash Gallery of Art
Additional images courtesy of State Library of New South Wales © Michael Waite

Artwork reproductions:
courtesy of the artists and their representatives as noted

Exhibition supporters:

Cover images:
Kawita VATANAJYANKUR
Carrier (detail) 2017
two stills from video
reproduction courtesy of the artist and
Stills Gallery (Sydney)
Exhibition introduction

Taken around 1937 by revered photographer Max Dupain (1911–1992), the ‘Sunbaker’ entered Australian consciousness in the mid-1970s. Almost 80 years on, the Australian Centre for Photography has commissioned 15 Australian artists to create new work in response to this iconic photograph.

Under the sun proposes different layers of interpretation and new perspectives on what this image signifies today. Looking at the photograph’s social and political implications, the artists have exposed the complexities at play around collective and national identity. These diverse works consider immigration, colonisation and our relationship with the land while also reflecting on gender issues and the idealised body.

Starting with the medium of photography, the exhibition expands to incorporate sculpture, video and installation works. Viewed together, the works invite us to contemplate the breadth and power of contemporary photography and its ability to provoke controversy and challenge simplistic perceptions of our culture.

Claire Monneraye
Curator, Australian Centre for Photography
Art Industry Contexts - Overview from the Study Design

In this area of study students focus on the analysis of artworks and the requirements and conditions of the environments where artworks are displayed.

Students examine a variety of art exhibitions and review the methods and considerations involved in the preparation, presentation and conservation of artworks. As part of this requirement, students visit at least two different art exhibitions in their current year of study. Students analyse how specific artworks are presented and demonstrate their understanding of the artists’ and curators’ consideration of how artworks are displayed within the art exhibitions.

The conservation of artworks in an exhibition is the concern of artists and the personnel associated with art spaces where the artworks are placed. With reference to specific artworks seen and studied, students develop an awareness and understanding of processes and considerations involved in the display of artworks to the public. Students research art exhibitions and compare the preparation, presentation, conservation and promotion of art in at least two different exhibition spaces. Students may select artworks exhibited in public art galleries and museums, commercial and private galleries, university art galleries, artist run spaces, alternative art spaces, outdoor spaces and online galleries.

Outcome 3

On completion of this unit the student should be able to compare the methods used by artists and considerations of curators in the preparation, presentation, conservation and promotion of specific artworks in at least two different exhibitions. To achieve this outcome the student will draw on the following key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 3.
Key knowledge

• the methods and intentions of public art galleries and museums, commercial and private galleries, university art galleries, artist run spaces, alternative art spaces, outdoor spaces and online galleries in exhibiting artworks

• the curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and displaying artworks in current exhibitions

• the methods used by and considerations of artists and curators working in galleries in conservation of artworks, including lighting, temperature, storage, transportation and presentation of specific artworks in current exhibitions

• the processes associated with the production, presentation, conservation and promotion of specific artworks in current exhibitions

• the characteristics of different types of gallery spaces visited in the current year of study

• appropriate terminology

Key skills

• identify and describe the characteristics of different types of gallery spaces visited in the current year of study

• describe and compare the methods of and intentions in exhibiting artworks in public art galleries and museums, commercial and private galleries, artist run spaces, alternative art spaces, university art galleries and museums, outdoor spaces and online galleries, which have been visited in the year of study

• analyse how specific artworks are presented in different exhibitions and demonstrate an understanding of the artists’ and gallery curators’ intentions

• analyse and evaluate curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and presenting specific artworks for display

• analyse and evaluate methods and considerations involved in the conservation of specific artworks related to exhibitions visited in the current year of study

• employ appropriate terminology
Monash Gallery of Art

Outcome 3 | Key knowledge

- the characteristics of different types of gallery spaces visited in the current year of study
- appropriate terminology

Monash Gallery of Art is a public municipal gallery in the City of Monash. The gallery has an extensive Australian photography collection and is known as The Australian home of photography. MGA has a Gallery Director and is governed by both the City of Monash and a Committee of Management (a board of volunteers). The gallery also employs two Curators, an Education and Public Programs coordinator, an Operations Manager, a Gallery Coordinator, a Fundraising and Marketing Coordinator, a Registrar and a Framer.

Monash Gallery of Art has five seasons of exhibitions per year. These are mainly photographic exhibitions from a range of sources including curated exhibitions from the MGA collection, exhibitions of solo artists or groups of artists around a theme or event; or exhibitions from other galleries interstate and internationally, known as travelling exhibitions.

MGA has two curators, who plan and curate most of the exhibitions presented throughout the year. They may consult with the artist/s if loaning work from an individual, or they may discuss with the touring manager or original curator (if a travelling exhibition).

The gallery has two major exhibition spaces, and a distinctive third smaller space that is currently configured to include a fourth space for projections or video work.

Often the first two major spaces (Gallery 1 & Gallery 2) are used to display one large exhibition, with Gallery 3 presenting a smaller hang of complementary work. As the gallery is a flexible space, it can also be used to display three separate exhibitions, or one exhibition across all three spaces. The curators consider all the spaces, and how they fit together, at all times.
Exhibition concept

Outcome 3 | Key knowledge

• the methods and intentions of public art galleries and museums, commercial and private galleries, university art galleries, artist run spaces, alternative art spaces, outdoor spaces and online galleries in exhibiting artworks

• the characteristics of different types of gallery spaces visited in the current year of study

Outcome 3 | Key skills

• describe and compare the methods of and intentions in exhibiting artworks in public art galleries and museums, commercial and private galleries, artist run spaces, alternative art spaces, university art galleries and museums, outdoor spaces and online galleries, which have been visited in the year of study

*The ‘Sunbaker’ has been recently dated to January 1938, despite the artist’s inscription of 1937.

Under the sun: Reimagining Max Dupain's ‘Sunbaker’ is presented by Australian Centre for Photography (ACP) in partnership with Monash Gallery of Art (MGA). Under the sun is an exhibition of 15 contemporary artists who were commissioned to create new work in response to modernist Australian photographer Max Dupain’s iconic photograph ‘Sunbaker’ from 1938*.

The curator of ACP, Claire Monneraye, selected these artists (10 women, and 5 men) to 'even-out' the gender imbalance of the ‘Sunbaker’s’ iconic status (the photographer, the subject, the time period and the history of photography are male-dominated). Artists included are: Peta Clancy, Christopher Day, Destiny Deacon, Michaela Gleave, Nasim Nasr, Sara Oscar, Julie Rrap, Khaled Sabsabi, Yhonnie Scarce, Christian Thompson, Angela Tiatia, Kawita Vatanajyankur, Daniel von Sturmer, Justene Williams and William Yang.

Under the sun explores views of our culture, our identity and our nationhood through works that will surprise, challenge and enthuse audiences. The mix of commissioned artists reflects Australia’s multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-faith nature, enabling a creative and often very personal exploration of the question ‘is there something new under the sun?’ These artists will contemplate, challenge and interpret the representation of Max Dupain’s photograph – an icon of a particular time and a particular vision of Australian culture – while offering unique perspectives on what it could possibly signify in our current society.

* Under the sun Reimagining Max Dupain’s ‘Sunbaker’
Exhibition design

Outcome 3 | Key knowledge

- the curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and displaying artworks in current exhibitions

Outcome 3 | Key skills

- analyse and evaluate curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and presenting specific artworks for display

Under the sun is a large exhibition that fills all the gallery spaces, across three rooms. As you enter the gallery you pass through the gift shop which has a large display of Under the sun catalogues and also a digital monitor above the doorway. This monitor rotates through the exhibition title, a key image (Max Dupain’s ‘Sunbaker’) and information about upcoming events. The glass sliding door allows you to see into the gallery and the title wall of the exhibition is centred on the doorway. This means the audience can see the title of the show from outside.

Once through the glass sliding door you can see the full title wall. This wall is very large (approx. 6 metres across) and fills your point of view, preventing you from seeing the rest of the exhibition. It contains the title graphic, partnership acknowledgment and sponsorship logos, a list of artists’ names and the Curator’s introduction. In addition to this introductory text, throughout the exhibition each artist has an individual label next to their work to provide the title/s of the work, materials, information about ownership of the work, plus a statement about the work written by the ACP’s Curator Claire Monneraye.

The exhibition layout was planned by the MGA Curator Stella Loftus-Hills (in consultation with ACP Curator) using a 2D scaled drawing created as an Illustrator file (opposite). The works were positioned and scaled accordingly to each exhibition space.

Stella Loftus-Hills travelled to Sydney to see the exhibition in person before planning the MGA iteration of the show. Travel to see exhibitions is not always possible, but very beneficial to understanding the original curator’s intention for the display. When unable to travel MGA curators consult photographs of the original hang of the show.
Under the sun  Reimagining Max Dupain’s ‘Sunbaker’

GALLERY 1

GALLERY 2

GALLERY 3

NOTE: CURVED WALL
Consult the diagram used by the MGA Curator for the exhibition layout on the previous page. You’ll see there are a few differences between this plan and the final outcome. These changes were decided once the works had arrived from Sydney and laid out in the gallery spaces.

The changes were as follows:

1. Placeholder images of the title wall from the hang in Sydney were used here to indicate the text required on this wall. The title wall was redesigned to fit the (very) large scale of the temporary wall compared to Sydney’s two small walls. Also there was no need for a display case at the entrance for additional historical objects, as they did not travel with the show. Two seats and two ipads were included in this place to share the video interviews with the artists.

2. At the rear of Gallery 1, Nasim Nasr’s projection was moved off the West Wall and onto the North Wall, to allow enough space for the bench seat to be placed at the distance from the projection that the artist requested.

3. In Gallery 2, Destiny Deacon’s work was moved from the curved wall in the North-West Corner to the East Wall.

If you look carefully at the diagram you will also see a thin pale blue line that runs across each wall. This is the eyeline, the height from the floor that the gallery uses to centre the artworks. MGA has two eyelines depending on the exhibition design. Either 150cm for the lower walls or 155cm for the taller walls. You’ll also note that the sculpture does not appear on this diagram (as it is not located in front of any walls).
Exhibition design

Outcome 3 | Key knowledge

- the curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and displaying artworks in current exhibitions

Outcome 3 | Key skills

- describe and compare the methods of and intentions in exhibiting artworks in public art galleries and museums, (...) which have been visited in the year of study

- analyse how specific artworks are presented in different exhibitions and demonstrate an understanding of the artists’ and gallery curators’ intentions

- analyse and evaluate curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and presenting specific artworks for display

- analyse and evaluate methods and considerations involved in the conservation of specific artworks related to exhibitions visited this year

Gallery 1

This room contains historical information about MAX DUPAIN and his ‘Sunbaker’, ANNE ZAHALKA’s ‘The Sunbather #2’ (a famous appropriation of Dupain’s work, from 1989) and four of the contemporary artists (28 photographs and one video projection with sound). Each artist has either their own wall or are surrounded by sufficient negative space, which works to separate each artist.

As you enter the Gallery 1 you’re surrounded by the ‘Sunbaker’. Two versions appear on your right, and one on your left. This repetition of the image refers to the iconic status of the photograph, widely seen and recognised by the general public for the past 40 years. It also assists those visitors who are not familiar with the ‘Sunbaker’ to view it prior to seeing the responses of the contemporary artists in the exhibition.

Also at this time the ‘Sunbaker’ is being used to promote two other exhibitions in Melbourne! At the Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery and also as a social media image for the upcoming exhibition about the 1930s at the NGV. The ubiquitousness of this image in Melbourne does assist with raising the profile of the exhibitions— but could also cause confusion amongst visitors.

The two ‘Sunbaker’s’ to your right are part of the exhibition tour from Sydney. They are a contemporary posthumous ink-jet print and a vintage poster from 1975. The two on your left (a vintage silver gelatin print, and Anne Zahalka’s work) are from the MGA Collection. These have been added to the exhibition by the MGA Curators to provide a local context.

Further along this wall is DANIEL VON STURMER’s work ‘Sunbaker, (MGA replica)’ which refers directly to the ‘Sunbaker’ in the MGA Collection.
Moving further into Gallery 1, you see SARA OSCAR’s work installed into a corner (as it was shown this way in Sydney, as prescribed by the artist), each print is individually pinned to the wall. Depending on when you visited the exhibition, there may have been a white line taped to the floor to encourage visitors to step back. The works are otherwise unprotected. This photographic installation provides the viewer with many entry points and encourages the viewer to create their own narratives. Compared to the MGA Collection works and the Daniel VON STURMER work opposite, where each work has its own spotlight, the curators have lit OSCAR’s work using flood lights – evenly illuminating all the works – encouraging the viewer to view them all as one body of work. This is also a visual similarity between VON STURMER’s image and some of the images with text in OSCAR’s work (black box on a white background), this may also have been a consideration for the curator’s when deciding which works would face one another across the room.

JUSTENE WILLIAMS’s work is also placed into the alcove created by the temporary walls. These temporary walls help the curators to divide the gallery spaces and isolate works from one another.

NASIM NASR’s projected work hides around the second temporary wall, although you can hear its audio as you enter the gallery space. By placing it behind the wall, viewers are not distracted by the movement of the work when viewing the other works in the space, the bright light does not fall onto any of the other works in the space and it also provides a sense of isolation for the viewer (who may like to join in the dancing on the beach!).

As you exit Gallery 1 through the central doorway you are confronted by JULIE RRAP’s sculptural work ‘Speechless’. The location of this work was not decided upon until Claire Monneraye came to Melbourne for the exhibition installation week. The work acts as a visual reminder of...
Look closely at Sara OSCAR’s work, you can see they are centred on the lower height of the temporary wall, rather than the full height wall. Also note the flood lighting.

Nasim NASR’s projection is positioned to touch the floor, reinforcing the point of view of the photographer in the original ‘Sunbaker’. The temporary walls work to shield the projection from the other works.

Inclusion of wall mounted screens for video content.

Note MGA’s vintage Max DUPAIN work placed close to Daniel von STURMER’s ‘replica’. Also note the spot lighting.

Gallery 1 – installation photographs
‘Sunbaker’ (the premise of the exhibition) before you view the rest of the exhibition. It also points you towards MICHAELA GLEAVE’s work on the far wall, encouraging you both into the space and to question the connection between these two works.

Gallery 2 contains the work of eight artists. The Curators have had to find ways to ensure each artist’s work is allowed enough space for the works to be considered individually. Often this is the role that lighting will play, see CHRISTIAN THOMPSON and ANGELA TIATIA’s work as an example. Each work has been lit using a spot light to differentiate the works.

Michaela GLEAVE and PETA CLANCY’s work face one another across the room. Both of these artists use the impact of colonialism as their starting points, and both explore the massacres of Indigenous Australians in their work.

In Sydney Peta CLANCY’s work was shown in a different grouping, on a much smaller temporary wall (see left). The display of CLANCY’s work was an evolving discussion between ACP Curator Claire Monneraye and the artist. CLANCY provided a few suggested configurations once the scale of the temporary wall was known. Once the wall was selected in Melbourne the Curators referred to the artists’ suggestions and selected the one that suited the wall the best, in this case the one presented as two diptychs. The space between the works acts to separate the diptychs. The single hang presentation (works in a singular line) allows the horizon line to travel across the wall between works.
Under the sun  Reimagining Max Dupain’s ‘Sunbaker’

Gallery 2 – installation photographs

Julie RRAP’s sculpture of the impression of Sunbaker is facing you as you approach Gallery 2, framed by the doorway.

Peta CLANCY’s work hangs opposite Michaela GLEAVE forming a connection between the two works and their exploration of massacres. Here on the far left, you can also see the view into Gallery 1 which shows Nasim NASR’s video work.

Michaela GLEAVE’s multi-panelled work is hung using a ‘split batten’ system. This hides the hanging mechanism from view and has the work appearing to float on the wall.

This wall features visual repetition, with the Curator grouping works together in a similar vertical format.

Angela TIATIA and Christian THOMPSON are placed next to one another for their performative aspect, focus on issues of colonisation and use of the self in their works.
**Exhibition design continued**

**Outcome 3 | Key knowledge**

- the curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and displaying artworks in current exhibitions

**Outcome 3 | Key skills**

- analyse how specific artworks are presented in different exhibitions and demonstrate an understanding of the artists’ and gallery curators’ intentions
- analyse and evaluate curatorial considerations, exhibition design and promotional methods involved in preparing and presenting specific artworks for display

In Gallery 3, WILLIAM YANG’s work is spread across the curved wall that runs the full length of the gallery space. Often Curator’s have to work around physical constraints of the gallery spaces, and hanging flat frames on a curved surface can be problematic. Additionally this gallery space has a lower ceiling, access to a meeting room through glass doors, and public toilets at the back, making it a challenging space to utilise. This space was originally the entrance to the gallery and contained the gift shop and cafe prior to the renovations in the early 2000s.

The curve of the wall, combined with its height, limits the scale of the work that can be presented (anything too large will sit off the wall unnaturally). The scale of YANG’s prints suit the height of this wall. The curator’s have used this to their advantage by placing different sized works in groupings across the wall, again replicating the way this body of work was displayed in Sydney, as the artist had prescribed.

Also in Gallery 3, MGA has constructed a fourth space to house the video component of KHALED SABSABI’s work. When shown in Sydney, the State Library of NSW constructed the box in the centre of one of their spaces. The framed works that accompany the video were wrapped around the outside of the box. It wasn’t possible to construct the box in this way at MGA or make all the walls available to hang on, so the works are shown partly on the box and also across two walls around the entrance to the video space.

above:
Installation view of Khaled SABSABI’s work at the State Library of NSW photo: Michael Waite
A separate space was build to house the three channel video projection of Khaled SABSABI’s work 229.

Unlike the work of GLEAVE or OSCAR, each work by YANG has an individual title, you can see these labels underneath the frames.

William YANG’s printed work spreads across the curved wall, pausing to allow a space for the video projection so that it feels cohesive with the hang of the work.
Conservation, presentation and promotion

**Outcome 3 | Key knowledge**

- the methods used by and considerations of artists and curators working in galleries in conservation of artworks, including lighting, temperature, storage, transportation and presentation of specific artworks in current exhibitions
- the processes associated with the production, presentation, conservation and promotion of specific artworks in current exhibitions

**Outcome 3 | Key skills**

- analyse and evaluate methods and considerations involved in the conservation of specific artworks related to exhibitions visited this year

MGA has a monitored air conditioning system that ensures the gallery spaces are kept at a constant 20 degrees celsius and between 45-50% humidity, which is appropriate for the care of works on paper such as photographs. MGA also has a monitored pest control system and a security camera system to protect the works.

The nature of the exhibition *Under the sun* is complex. There are many works that are fragile, or easy to damage if not properly cared for. During the three months of the exhibition, it was noted that some members of the public were getting too close to the works, so the gallery opted to add tape to the floor in front of some works. This added a visual reminder to viewers to step back away from the artwork. The most fragile works also have ‘do not touch’ stickers (a hand with a line through it) next to their labels on the wall.

Additional signage was also placed onto the plinth that housed YHONNIE SCARCE’s work. Each glass yam was temporarily stuck to the plinth or into the bucket using a product called ‘museum wax’. Which is also used in other parts of the world to secure objects in case of earthquakes!

The gallery staff continuously monitor the artworks whilst on display, but the most important checking of the condition of the works occurs when they first arrive in the building and is repeated when they depart the building. This is called *condition reporting*. Each individual work or object has its own condition report that provides a checklist of things to look for as well as a large reproduction of the work that is able to be drawn on top of (annotated) to locate the exact position of scratches or other damage to the works. See the next page for a copy of MGA’s standard condition reports (three pages) that travels with each of our Collection works when they are out of the building. Artworks for this
Reimagining Max Dupain’s ‘Sunbaker’

Outcome 3 | Key knowledge

- the methods used by and considerations of artists and curators working in galleries in conservation of artworks, including lighting, temperature, storage, transportation and presentation of specific artworks in current exhibitions

- the processes associated with the production, presentation, conservation and promotion of specific artworks in current exhibitions

right:
MGAs standard condition report. A three page document that travels with the artwork to each venue.
Conservation, presentation and promotion continued

Outcome 3 | Key knowledge

- the methods used by and considerations of artists and curators working in galleries in conservation of artworks, including lighting, temperature, storage, transportation and presentation of specific artworks in current exhibitions
- the processes associated with the production, presentation, conservation and promotion of specific artworks in current exhibitions

The exhibition travelled inside specially constructed crates which were moved by art transport couriers, to ensure their safety and appropriate handling, for example, in air-conditioned trucks.

The exhibition has been extensively advertised on the gallery’s website. The front page of the website has a slideshow of works in the exhibition in addition to the exhibition listing and public program events. There are also small advertising postcards available with ‘Sunbaker’ on the front and information about the exhibition on the back. The exhibition also has a full colour catalogue, which is sent as a promotional tool to potential reviewers or journalists. The catalogue also plays a role in more organic advertising (you view the show, buy the catalogue, show a friend and they decide to come and see the show too).

Locally, MGA’s Major Partner Waverley BMW placed a large banner in their service centre waiting lounge to promote the exhibition alongside making the postcards available to their visitors.

In addition to this onsite promotion, the exhibition was promoted widely on the gallery’s social media sites (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter). Plus the exhibition was also promoted on these platforms by the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney. MGA also sends fortnightly enewsletters to subscribers.

The exhibition received editorial coverage in The Age (a double page spread of images), the article was also made available online. Editorial also appeared on the websites Broadsheet Melbourne and Art Guide Australia. Paid advertising also appeared in Art Guide Australia and Art Almanac and the NGV members magazine. MGA’s Senior Curator Stephen Zagala was also interviewed on TripleRRR radio about the exhibition on their arts program ‘Smart arts’ with Richard Watts.
Glossary

Outcome 3 | Key skills

- employ appropriate terminology

**public municipal gallery**
A gallery which receives public funds from the local government

**commission**
To pay an artist to create a new work

**travelling exhibition**
An exhibition that moves to different locations, including the curator’s texts or artist statements. Think of it like a ‘pop up’ exhibition.

**title wall**
A wall that contains the title of the exhibition (usually located at the entrance to the space); often has sponsor logos and/or introductory text

**temporary wall**
A wall that can be moved or repositioned

**to lay out an exhibition; the exhibition was laid out**
To place the artworks into their location around the gallery space. Initially electronically using thumbnails, sometimes using a 3D model, before physically placing the works around the floor of the gallery spaces prior to installation

**eyeline**
The height (measured from the floor) that an art gallery uses to hang the centre of their artworks on average

**diptych**
An artwork consisting of two parts, considered as one artwork

**condition reporting**
The act of noting the condition of an artwork (and its support/frame) by a gallery staff member, usually the Registrar or Curator