

Zombie Eaters Education Resource

MURRAY ART MUSEUM ALBURY

Education Kit



Hamishi Farah
Matthew, 2020
Acrylic and permanent marker on linen, 43 x 33cm
Courtesy the artist and Maxwell Graham/Essex Street, New York &
Arcadia Missa, London

MAMA

Zombie Eaters

Featuring:

Fiona Lowry, Hamishi Farah, Juan Davila and Kate Smith

With works by:

Amanda Marburg, Anna Kristensen, Daniel Boyd, Fred Cress, John Citizen, Gordon Hookey, Jackson Slattery, James Gleeson, Jelena Telecki, Josey Kidd-Crowe, John Young, Jude Rae, Julie Fragar, Karen Black, Kayleen Whiskey, Kieran Seymour, Margaret Olley, Marlene Gilson, Mitch Cairns, Natalya Hughes, Nicola Smith, Nigel Milsom, Patrick Hartigan, Pierre Mukeba, Stephen Bush, Tim Schultz, Vanessa Inkamala, Zoë M Robertson.

Zombie Eaters is an exhibition that looks to celebrate strengths in recent Australian painting. It is centered on four artists – Fiona Lowry, Hamishi Farah, Juan Davila, and Kate Smith – whose works are featured alongside 28 artists' work drawn from the Murray Art Museum Albury collection as well as public and private collections nationwide. The works date from 1960 onwards, with a focus on contemporary painting.

The four central artists approach painting as an active and enquiring medium. They display the medium's ability to contend with artistic, political, cultural, and personal challenges. This approach continues throughout the exhibition, across a wide range of figurative approaches to painting.

There is an art joke that suggests painting is a zombie medium. It refuses to die, and like the undead zombie, walks the earth endlessly in search of brains. The joke is easily applied to the kind of painting that, over recent decades has been produced purely for decoration and which has been taken up by cynical collectors playing a market for profit. *Zombie Eaters* claims this joke need not be true. The paintings within it are vital, intelligent, and thought provoking. They are made by artists invested in the social and cultural potential of art.

These painters are the *Zombie Eaters*. The conquerors of the undead. They ensure painting lives forever.

*This Education Resource for the exhibition *Zombie Eaters* has been developed to accompany the NSW HSC curriculum and is suitable for years 9 – 12.*

Case Study: Juan Davila

Introduction

Juan Davila was born in Santiago, Chile in 1946 and later moved to Melbourne, Australia in 1974, after the fall of the socialist Allende government. Davila has been working between the two countries ever since.

At the time of Davila's move to Australia, there was great political upheaval in his home country and paintings created during this period reference this violence and psychological turmoil. Davila's distrust for nationalism and state control has a strong presence in his works, which extended into critiques of the Australian political system, policies and political figures from both Chile and Australia. Davila explores the complex association between art and politics, questioning both the impact that politics can have on art, but also the part art can play in creating change.

Davila initially completed studies in Law and uses art to debate issues of social and political significance. Davila's vast and varied body of work explores cultural, sexual and social identities through paintings, installations and works on paper.

Juan Davila is internationally recognised for his innovation in painting. Davila is represented in every major public collection in Australia, as well as New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo in Spain. His works have been widely exhibited throughout Australia, South and North America and Europe and was included in the 1982 and 1984 Biennales of Sydney and the 1998 São Paulo Biennial.

Techniques, Materials and Processes

Juan Davila's paintings often incorporate collaged elements, text, found objects, appropriated imagery, photography, and other media. Davila pushes the possibility of what a painting can be by combining mixed media within his works. Some works span beyond the canvas onto the walls or floor of the gallery space.

Themes

Society and culture
Cultural aspects of late capitalism
Australian political system
Structures of the art world
Sexuality
Mythology
Treatment of refugees in Australian detention centres

Further Reading

Juan Davila: The Artist as Historian

<https://kalirolfecontemporaryart.com/artists/juan-davila/texts/post/juan-davila-the-artist-as-historian/index.html>

Juan Davila collection of sketchbooks

<https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/La-Trobe-Journal-100-Olga-Tsara-02.pdf>

Monash University - Juan Davila: The Moral Meaning of Wilderness

<https://www.monash.edu/muma/exhibitions/previous/2011/juan-davila-the-moral-meaning-of-wilderness>

A man renounces love, 2010



Juan Davila

A man renounces love, 2010

Oil on canvas, 200 x 280cm

Courtesy Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art

Photography Mark Ashkanasy

In Juan Davila's work *A man renounces love* 2010, the artist recasts a scene from the Opera, *Das Rheingold*, in which the character Alberich has stolen the Rhinemaidens' gold. The gold is said to be able to be cast into a ring which gives the power to rule the world, if the bearer first renounces love. Juan Davila brings himself into this painting as the main character, Alberich, who he paints in his own likeness, an aging man within the Australian landscape.

Das Rheingold was written by German composer, Richard Wagner and first performed in 1869 at the National Theatre Munich. The opera explores concepts of love, sacrifice, human suffering, redemption, and power.

Das Rheingold: Scene 1

At the bottom of the Rhine, the three Rhinemaidens, Woglinde, Wellgunde, and Floßhilde, play together. Alberich, a Nibelung dwarf, appears from a deep chasm and tries to woo them. The maidens mock his advances, and he grows angry – he chases them, but they elude, tease and humiliate him. A sudden ray of sunshine pierces the depths, to reveal the Rhinegold. The maidens rejoice in the gold's gleam. Alberich asks what it is. They explain that the gold, which their father has ordered them to guard, can be made into a magic ring which gives power to rule the world, if its bearer first renounces love. The maidens think they have nothing to fear from the lustful dwarf, but Alberich, embittered by their mockery, curses love, seizes the gold and returns to his chasm, leaving them screaming in dismay.

Student Activity

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- 1 a What do the art terms 'appropriation' and 'recontextualisation' mean and how do they apply to Juan Davila's works?
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- 1 b Look at Davila's work *A man renounces love*, 2010 and read Scene 1 from *Das Rheingold*. What has the artist incorporated within this painting to tell this story to the audience?
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- 1 c As a class discuss the different materials and techniques that Juan Davila has explored in his practice. How was he used brush strokes, colours and painting techniques to convey a message?
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- 1 d As the viewer, what is your own personal response to Davila's works?
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Juan Davila
Untitled, 2011-2012
Oil on canvas, 200 x 300cm
Courtesy Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art
Photography Mark Ashkanasy

Case Study: Pierre Mukeba

Introduction

Pierre Mukeba was born in 1995 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Due to the civil war breaking out, he later fled his country with family. They travelled as refugees to Zambia and Zimbabwe before seeking asylum in Adelaide, Australia where Mukeba has lived and worked since 2006.

Mukeba took up art making as a refugee in Zimbabwe where he began learning from his Uncle. He was also inspired by his Grandfather who is a Congolese artist.

Pierre Mukeba's early works were created on bedsheets using a combination of pencils, brush pens and charcoal. He incorporated inspiration from his Mother's bright patterned clothing in these works.

Pierre Mukeba is known for his large scale multimedia works featuring African textiles which speak to stories of migration, displacement, war trauma and Australia's African diaspora. Mukeba's work is drawn from a mixture of experience and imagination. Mukeba's collages create surreal scenes from stories depicting memories, family, violence, trauma and exploitation. His work combines collage, drawing, painting, fabrics and appliques of African wax-resist fabrics.

In 2017 Mukeba created the *Trauma* series for his first solo show at GAGAPROJECTS in Adelaide. This evocative series was comprised of full-length multimedia portraits of child soldiers, exploited workers, mothers, and victims of violence and poverty.

After this series Mukeba continued to create works portraying strong characters, including *Impartiality* (2018), which draws from Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. Version O)* (1907), and portrays four African women at different life stages. In a New York Times feature of Mukeba's work, the artist explains: 'I focused on the strength that these women hold, regardless of the situations that have been inflicted on them.'

Techniques, Materials and Processes

Pierre Mukeba's large scale works are often created from a mix of media on unstretched fabric. Works include collage of patterned fabrics, brush pens, charcoal, painting and drawing.

Mukeba uses patterned Dutch wax print fabrics commonly perceived as being African, while in reality, they were appropriated from traditional Javanese batik by Dutch colonisers in the 19th century, mass produced in Europe and exported to Africa.

Some more recent works like *(Blue) Heels*, 2021, are comprised of charcoal and pastel on archival paper.

Themes

Migration
Displacement
War Trauma
Political and economic unrest
African representation
African diaspora
The refugee crisis
Socio-cultural standards of beauty
Culture and identity

DANCING DEER, 2021



Pierre Mukeba
DANCING DEER, 2021
Oil paint, acrylic paint, ink and fabric on Belgian linen, 180 x 400cm
Courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery

Further Reading

Art Almanac - Pierre Mukeba: Black Emotion

<https://www.art-almanac.com.au/pierre-mukeba-black-emotion/>

Ramsay Art Prize finalist Pierre Mukeba named the people's favourite

<https://www.adelaidereview.com.au/arts/visual-arts/2019/08/09/ramsay-art-prize-peoples-choice-pierre-mukeba/>

Student Activity

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- 2 a Look at Pierre Mukeba's work *DANCING DEER*, what themes do you think the artist is exploring in this work? Why?
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- 2 b Mukeba creates works of art that reflect his life experiences. He has said that he wants to bring attention to the traumas that have taken place in The Democratic Republic of the Congo and what is happening in Africa now. "*I make art about this because it needs to be understood by everyone.*" Research other artists who have responded to conflict or unrest. How do their representations compare to Mukeba's works of art?
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- 2 c Discuss the different materials used by Pierre Mukeba in his works – collage, fabric, charcoal. How do these different elements convey meaning (the roughness of the charcoal, disjoined collage elements)?

Case Study: John Citizen

Introduction

John Citizen emerged in 1995 as an alias of the artist Gordon Bennett, invented as a new persona to allow the artist to explore other forms and styles of art that did not fit into his multifaceted art making practice.

Citizen sprung into existence in an effort to question the construct of identity. The name was picked as it suggested an average Australian everyman of no stated colour or creed. Bennett was concerned that his identity and work was seen as coming from a narrow framework. So he adopted this persona to liberate himself from the preconceptions that were often associated with his Indigenous Australian heritage and his identity and reputation as Gordon Bennett.¹

*"If my work is political then that is because of the politics of my position and the cultural climate in which I live and work. I didn't go to Art College to graduate as an 'Aboriginal Artist,'"*²

John Citizen's interior paintings are inspired by decorator and home magazines which frequent newsagency and supermarket shelves. Citizen's works questioning the superficial nature of middle class, urban values through portrayals of the ideals of the "perfect home". The absence of human forms in the space and the outlines with blocks of colour creates a sense of emptiness and loneliness within the works. There are many layers at play in these works, the interiors feature works on the wall by Gordon Bennett and John Citizen himself.

Some of the works featured in Citizen's interiors are from his *Coloured People* series. This series features large paintings of people who seem to be posing for a selfie or photograph, big smiles, striking a pose. In comparison to the interior paintings, works in the *Coloured People* series present the subjects on a grey background. The subjects themselves are brightly coloured and patterned, though they all share white, pupil-less eyes.

*"Rather than playing the joker, John Citizen acts the devil's advocate in the lounge room and the spaces we inhabit. These paintings evidence how the appropriation of culture can be applied to lift the veil on the representation of others and how the desire for a fashionably conservative style is repeatedly accommodated over values enabling a civil yet diversely populated domicile."*³

Techniques, Materials and Processes

John Citizen's interiors are painted with acrylic on linen. These works often feature works of art hung on the wall which are reproductions of Gordon Bennett and John Citizen works.

Paint is applied smoothly in works. Black outlines are painted to show the structure of objects and filled in with singular colours.

1 Bill Wright's interview with Gordon Bennett in Gellatly K with contributions by Clemens, Justin; Devery, Jane; and Wright, Bill

2 Bendigo Advertiser. 2022. *Indigenous voice is unique and complex*. Available at: <https://www.bendigoadvertiser.com.au/story/4698568/indigenous-voice-is-unique-and-complex/>

3 Sutton Gallery. *John Citizen Interiors and Coloured People*. Available at: <https://suttongallery.com.au/exhibitions/interiors-and-coloured-people/>

Themes

Identity

Characterisation

Indigenous Australian heritage

Modernism

Appropriation

Abstraction

Culture

Selected Artwork



John Citizen
Interior (Orange Lampshade), 2008
Courtesy The Estate of Gordon Bennett and
Sutton Gallery

Additional Works



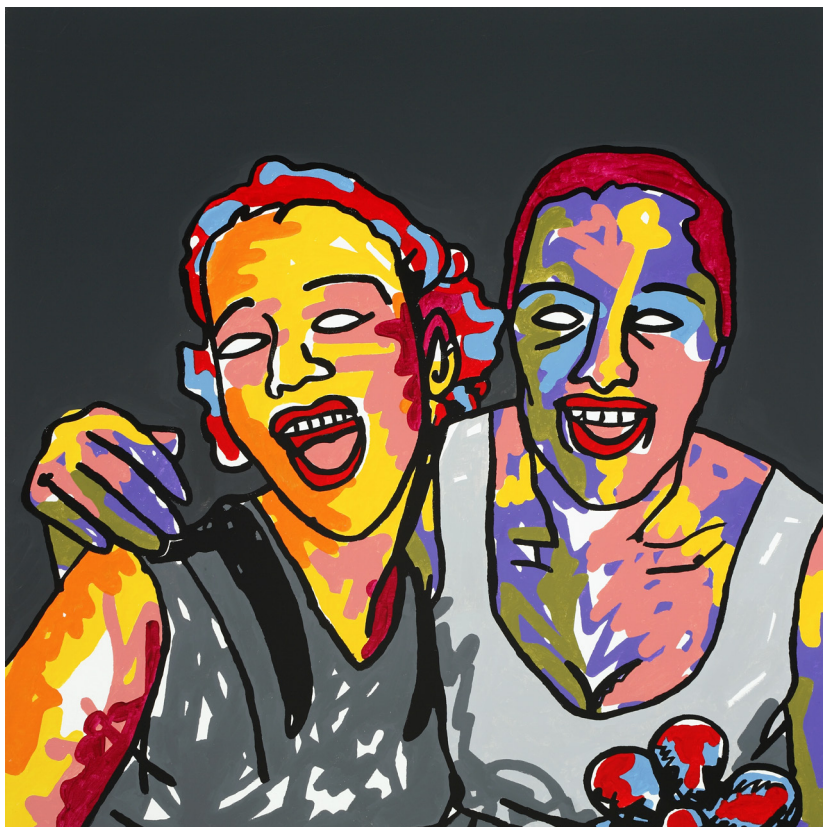
John Citizen
Interior (Digital Art), 2005
Acrylic on linen, 152 x 152cm
Courtesy and © The Estate of Gordon Bennett



John Citizen
Interior (Sideboard), 2006
Acrylic on linen, 152 x 152cm
Courtesy and © The Estate of Gordon Bennett



John Citizen
Interior (Green Lounge Suite), 2006
 Acrylic on linen, 152 x 152cm
 Courtesy and © The Estate of Gordon Bennett



John Citizen
Coloured People No 27, 2006
 Acrylic on linen, 101 x 101cm
 Courtesy and © The Estate of Gordon Bennett



John Citizen
Interior (Tribal Rug), 2006
 Acrylic on linen, 152 x 152cm
 Courtesy and © The Estate of Gordon Bennett

Further Reading

University of Wollongong – Who is John Citizen?

<https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1490&context=creartspapers>

Sutton Gallery – John Citizen Interiors and Coloured People

<https://suttongallery.com.au/exhibitions/interiors-and-coloured-people/>

Who is John Citizen? By Ian McLean, 2006

<https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1490&context=creartspapers>

Student Activity

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- 3 a How does Gordon Bennett explore the construct of identity through his practice as John Citizen?
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- 3 b Look closely at the colours and lines you can see in Citizen's painting *Interior (Orange Lampshade)*. How would you describe this painting to someone who hasn't seen it?
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- 3 c Look at Citizen's painting *Interior (Orange Lampshade)*. What works can be found in the background? (Hint: they are Gordon Bennett works.) Why do you think the artist includes his own works within works created under an alias name?
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- 3 d John Citizen and Gordon Bennett borrowed ideas and styles from many artists including Howard Arkley, Jackson Pollock, Margaret Preston and Piet Mondrian. Look up these artists and compare their works. What similarities do you notice between these artists works?
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- 3 e Discuss the statement "*Contemporary art is about contemporary life*". Refer to the 3 artists in this education package to support your argument.
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- 3 f Look at the additional artworks provided. How has John Citizen's practice evolved since 2005?

Glossary of Terms

Appropriation	to take or use an image and by placing it in a context different to its original context to generate new meanings.
Contemporary	of this time; recent; can also refer to museum collections from 1980s onwards.
Diaspora	the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland.
Identity	a person's idea or expression of their own (self-identity) and others' individuality or group associations (such as national identity or cultural identity).
Practice	an artist's method of working, their body of work or career development.