

Study Guide:

“Traveller #5” (2019) by Rajni Perera

About the artwork: *Traveller #5* (2019) by Rajni Perera belongs to a series of work, *Traveller*. This series is a sci-fi story celebrating immigrant resilience, which also asks questions about our current climate crisis. Perera is interested in the questions: “Who is alive after we burn the world,” “What do they look like?” and “What are they using to protect themselves?” *Traveller* includes more than 50 artworks in mediums such as painting, photography, sculpture, and wearable art. Perera’s Travellers are superhumans of a future time who have adapted the skills not only to survive in the era after environmental catastrophe, but to thrive. *Traveller #5* is constructed as a portrait and features an androgynous humanoid with seven eyes, each with a strange star-shaped pupil. The traveller is ornamented with jewellery and adorned in a variety of richly patterned textiles, giving them a regal air. In the background there is a stately domed structure — a nod to the unbuilt cenotaph for physicist Isaac Newton. *Traveller #5* holds a mysterious striped orb, which the artist calls a portal. It is symbolic of a brand-new way of thinking about the world. Perera likens the classic sci-fi narrative of off world survival to the experience of the immigrant. She refers to the character’s vestments as “ancestral armour”; magical technologies developed over centuries to protect the Traveller in inhospitable conditions. *Traveller #5* was Perera’s first large institutional acquisition, commissioned by the Royal Bank of Canada, whose curator says the work is “a reminder of how our choices now impact generations to come.”



About the artist: Rajni Perera was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1985 and grew up in a mixed Buddhist and Hindu community. As a small child, Perera’s parents had her Vedic chart read, which said that in a past life, she was an artist. At two years old, she displayed advanced skills with drawing tools, so her parents encouraged her with art supplies. Perera and her family immigrated to Australia and briefly to the United States before settling in Canada, living in North York and later Scarborough. Perera attended art school at Ontario College of Art & Design University (OCAD) in Toronto. Shortly after

graduation, she gave birth to her daughter. Initially, commercial galleries weren't interested in showing the young artist's work, so the enterprising Perera organized her own exhibitions and sold her own art, building both a business and a following from scratch. Science fiction has always been at the heart of Perera's work; visually and conceptually, it is her most important influence. When popular depictions of the future typically come from a white and Western perspective, Perera creates artifacts, narratives and mythologies imagining the future of immigrant communities as well as other marginalized groups. Sci-fi offers a window into another world — sometimes, a better world. But, the artist has also said that it can make you think about your life in the present: both the problems and the possibilities. Sci-fi gives us license to reimagine the prevailing norms and laws and build civilization anew.

Please preview the short film and then share it with your students. Select one or two guiding questions that reflect your curriculum and can guide student research and inquiry connected to the artwork, artists, and the socio-cultural context in which it was created.

Guiding Questions:

- How does this artwork reflect personal, cultural, and community identity and values of the artist?
- How does Perera's view of the world affirm or disrupt your own worldview?
- In what ways does this artwork examine the power of the immigrant experience?
- Examine the criteria for science fiction. Explore how this work both supports and disrupts the canon of sci-fi.
- How does power and privilege play into the artist's concept?
- In what ways does the artwork reflect different communities globally?
- What skills might the traveller need to thrive after an environmental catastrophe?
- Create an artwork, dance, dramatic scene, or creative writing piece that explores the power of your roots or your routes.
- Create an artwork, dance, dramatic scene, or creative writing piece that revisions our world, dismantling a social justice issue of today.
- Create an artwork, dance, dramatic scene or creative writing piece that explores life "after we burn the world".
- Create an artwork, dance, dramatic scene, or creative writing piece that explores life celebrating immigrant resilience or Indigenous resistance.
- Use *Traveller #5* as inspiration for a character. Create a dance, dramatic piece, short story, or graphic novel to tell the viewer about this traveller.
- Create a theme song for *Traveller #5*.
- How might have socio-political experiences of the artist and her community impacted her artmaking?

Supporting Links:

- [TRAVELLER — RAJNI PERERA](#)
- [Rajni Perera is the artist Toronto needs right now](#)
- [Rajni Perera's mythology for future diasporas on show at Art Toronto - RBC Wealth Management](#)
- [Sobey Art Awards 2021 - Rajni Perera](#)

- [Traveller – Eastside Projects](#)
- [Rajni Perera's Art Grapples with Power and Privilege](#)

Ontario Secondary Curriculum Connections

The Arts- Visual Arts

B1. The Critical Analysis Process: demonstrate an understanding of the critical analysis process by examining, interpreting, evaluating, and reflecting on various art works;

B2. Art, Society, and Values: demonstrate an understanding of how art works reflect the society in which they were created, and of how they can affect personal values;

C1. Terminology: demonstrate an understanding of, and use correct terminology when referring to, elements, principles, and other components related to visual arts;

C2. Conventions and Techniques: demonstrate an understanding of conventions and techniques used in the creation of visual art works;

A1. The Creative Process: apply the creative process to create a variety of art works, individually and/or collaboratively;

A2. The Elements and Principles of Design: apply elements and principles of design to create art works

for the purpose of self-expression and to communicate ideas, information, and/or messages;

The Arts - Media Arts

B1. The Critical Analysis Process: demonstrate an understanding of the critical analysis process by using it to monitor the creative process, and by examining, interpreting, assessing, and reflecting on media art works;

B2. Identity and Values: demonstrate an understanding of how media art works reflect personal and cultural identity, and affect personal, cultural, and community values and their awareness of those values;

C2. Contexts and Influences: demonstrate an understanding of the sociocultural and historical contexts of media arts;

A1. The Creative Process: apply the creative process to create media art works, individually and/or collaboratively;

A2. The Principles of Media Arts: design and produce media art works, applying the principles of

media arts and using various elements from contributing arts (dance, drama, music, visual arts);

A3. Using Technologies, Tools, and Techniques: apply traditional and emerging technologies, tools, and techniques to produce and present media art works for a variety of audiences and purposes.

The Arts - Dance

A1. The Creative Process: use the creative process, the elements of dance, and a variety of sources to develop movement vocabulary;

A2. Choreography and Composition: combine the elements of dance in a variety of ways in composing

individual and ensemble dance creations;

The Arts - Drama

A1. The Creative Process: use the creative process and a variety of sources and forms, both individually and collaboratively, to design and develop drama works;

A2. Elements and Conventions: use the elements and conventions of drama effectively in creating individual and ensemble drama works, including works based on a variety of sources;

A3. Presentation Techniques and Technologies: use a variety of presentation techniques and technological tools to enhance the impact of drama works and communicate for specific audiences and purposes.

The Arts - Music

A1. The Creative Process: apply the stages of the creative process when performing notated and/or improvised music and composing and/or arranging music;

A2. The Elements of Music: apply elements of music when performing notated and improvised music and composing and/or arranging music;

History:

A1. Historical Inquiry: use the historical inquiry process and the concepts of historical thinking when investigating aspects of Canadian history, with a focus on the development of identity and culture (CHI4U)

B2. Significant Interactions: analyse the impact of significant interactions, including interactions with the environment, on the selected ethnic group's country or region of origin

B3. Culture and Identity: analyse ways in which various factors contributed to the development of culture and identity in the selected ethnic group in its country or region of origin

Geography:

A1. Geographic Inquiry: use the geographic inquiry process and the concepts of geographic

thinking when investigating issues relating to Canadian geography

B1. The Physical Environment and Human Activities: analyse various interactions between physical processes, phenomena, and events and human activities in Canada

English:

Writing: use a variety of organizational structures and patterns to produce coherent and effective written work;

Writer's Craft:

- produce writing for a range of purposes and audiences with an emphasis on well-developed content and the effective use of appropriate forms, techniques, diction, voice, and style;