

Canal to Creek

WestConnex

Transurban

THE WESTCONNEX PUBLIC ART PROGRAM



VADEA
NSW

VISUAL ARTS & DESIGN
EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION

GREG JOHNS

NEAR THE CENTRE (THERE IS MUSIC) | STAGE 5 WORKSHEET



CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

VOCABULARY - Recontextualisation, anatomy, science, Aboriginality, Colonialism, Australia, history, installation, sculpture, landscape, power, observer, hybridisation, intertextuality

Define the following key terms within a glossary in your Visual Arts Diary:

Recontextualisation	
Anatomy	
Aboriginality	
Colonialism	
Installation	
Sculpture	
Landscape	

CONCEPTUAL PRACTICE

Greg Johns intention with his Canal to Creek submission *'is to provide [a] culturally significant sculpture which connects a site and a community in a challenging, thoughtful and inspiring way'* and that *'maintains integrity of sculpture and respect for community'*. He does this by creating two works that bring together his environmental concerns while also exploring the aboriginal context of the site.

In the centre is the piece titled ***Near the Centre (There is Music)*** Johns connects with the environmental side of the project ..[the] "mother" work to the installation figures. It is the generative, mandala like form [that] generates the surrounding 10 figurative forms' called ***The Observers***. These observers explore the indigenous experience of colonisation. Together they make up a sculptural installation artwork that resonate with a deep, layered understanding of the land and its connection to community.

The physical characteristics, felt sensibilities around community, historical input and the actual feel of the site have all contributed to the final design. Conceptual links can be drawn to the limitations of artworks, where does the space begin and end? What is art? Is the audience part of the artwork or are they two separate entities?

What are Johns intentions with his Canal to Creek submission?

MATERIAL PRACTICE

Greg Johns has chosen a large-scale central mandala form for *Near the Centre (There is Music)* that stands at 4 metres in height. This focal piece is then surrounded by 10 larger than life size figurative forms called The Observers standing at 180 to 220 cm in height. Scale is a significant and important choice of Johns as he intends for the work to be dramatic and immersive.

The artist has chosen strong materials like steel and concrete to ensure the structures withstand exposure to the natural elements but which also communicate a strength and power in the site. The concrete slab work emphasises the heaviness and permanence of their structure while the mandala form complements the surrounding treescape.

Johns has spread the sculptures over the landscape inviting the audience to move in and around the work, allowing for flow as the audience interacts within this space.

The fusion of cultural iconography chosen in this work alludes to a respect for the multicultural history of the site both pre and post colonisation and re-imagine a connectedness to the land that is 'reconciled'.

Explain the material choices of the artist in communicating his ideas?

INVESTIGATION QUESTIONS

- 1. STRUCTURAL FRAME** - Explain the key symbols of the central mandala and the observer figures employed by Johns in *Near the Centre (There is Music)*.
- 2. CULTURAL FRAME** - Greg Johns is an Aboriginal artist inspired by his own nationality and issues facing Australian society. Within the construction of *Near the Centre (There is Music)* Johns has chosen to represent issues of colonialism within our national history and how confronting they are still to this day. Explain how cultural issues are represented in this work.
- 3. AUDIENCE** - *Near the Centre (There is Music)* explores issues of colonisation by placing the audience within the work as objects to be observed and studied - as the First Nations people have been since colonisation. While these issues are subtle and ambiguous, the work does invite a basic human empathy within the audience to the feelings of marginalisation while walking through the work and being 'observed'. As an artwork within a public space, the artist has allowed for the audience to interpret their own meaning relative to this environment. The audience brings with them their own background knowledge and experience and is allowed to interpret the disempowerment within their own terms. How would your experience differ if you were - alone, in a group, in a hurry, meeting someone there and waiting for them? If the site was quiet or busy? On a sunny day, windy day or in the rain?





ARTMAKING TASK

Take screen shots and/or photographs of your travels through **Near the Centre (There is Music)** and document your images and observation in your Visual Arts diary. Annotate the step-by-step process of visiting the site and try to use the key terms provided. Where did you enter and exit? How did this impact your experience? What did you notice as interesting in your journey? What did you decide to exclude from this journey and why?

SCULPTURE TASK INSTRUCTIONS -

1. In your Visual Arts diary, draw a series of contour drawings to create semi-abstract figures (like the Observers)
2. Watch this video - <https://theartyteacher.com/drawing-with-wire/>
3. Using wire and wire cutters, construct three figures by bending your material to your contour drawings - start and finish from the bottom of your drawings (this will be clearer to you when you create your podium)
4. Once your wire sculptures are completed, you will be creating a podium. A podium is a support base that keeps your sculptures upright by themselves. Using a food package or container being thrown out, pour plaster into your molds and while it is still wet, insert the bottom of your sculpture into your podiums. You may need to rig something up to hold it in position while it is drying but once it is dry, it should hold up by itself.
5. The process of creating these figures should be documented in your Visual Diary.
6. You should then install your figures within an environment at home or at school, take photos and document the process.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

1. Look into the work of Robert Klippel, another sculptural artist who worked with metal sculptures, often on a much smaller scale to Johns. In regards to material practice, what similarities and differences can you draw from comparing the work of these to practitioners? Draw up a Venn Diagram to identify your finds.
2. How does scale play such an important role in the work of Johns?
3. Design your own prototype metal sculpture to be installed within your local environment.
4. What impact would you like to make on your audience? How would you intend to do this?
5. Annotate your work within your Visual Arts diary.