



The Memory Palace: Cyrus Tang

Learning Resource





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'The Memory Palace: Cyrus Tang' is a major exhibition at Town Hall Gallery featuring highlights from Cyrus Tang's multidisciplinary art practice.

Over the past 20 years Tang has examined nostalgia within memory and fantasy, fascinated by reconstructing mental images and sensations in permanent materials. She has explored ruins and decay of houses and cities, and of human bodies, while referencing current environmental and man-made catastrophes.

Working fluidly across sculpture, photography, video and installation, the artist has a distinctive style that embraces the materiality of her media. While her photographs and video works are presented in post-production digital format, the visual effects Tang employs are analogue, often the result of labour-intensive procedures in the studio or the field. Tang's work documents her chosen media going through a transformation, a convergence of past and present. The result is hauntingly beautiful works that often memorialise collective experiences.

This exhibition provides a range of thought-provoking contexts which offer opportunities to explore the concept of memory, culture, and the immigrant experience.

This learning guide is aimed at supporting students and teachers to engage in discussion and activities before, during and after a visit to 'The Memory Palace: Cyrus Tang' exhibition.

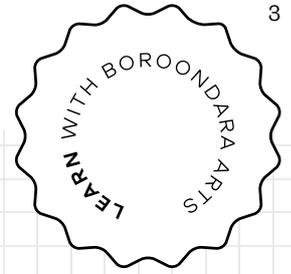
Through images and information about the artist and artworks, students are encouraged to participate in discussion and research to enhance their understanding of key themes around the exhibition.

This resource includes:

1. Preparation for teachers
2. Learnings and the Victorian Curriculum
3. Curriculum Links: Levels 3-6 Learning Areas and Capabilities
4. Discussion points and activities relating to the featured artist and artworks

More Information:

For more information about the Learn with Boroondara Arts program, education resources and activities, please contact us:



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1. PREPARATION FOR TEACHERS

Structuring your Tour:

This document includes a description of a selection of artworks in the exhibition, questions to ask your students, followed by information which can help you inform their responses and conclude the conversation when your class is ready to move on.

There are four artworks featured in the 'The Memory Palace: Cyrus Tang' learning resource. Allocate up to 15 minutes to discuss each artwork with your class and adjust as required.

The curatorial team have provided recommendations for which artworks to focus on depending on how much time you have allocated to view 'The Memory Palace: Cyrus Tang' with your class.

Tour Length	Recommended Structure
35 - 55 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Walk through the exhibition with your class and allow students time to contemplate the exhibition independently (5 - 10 minutes) 2. 'Supermarket' (2021) (10 -15 minutes) 3. 'Golden Hour - Long Exposure series' (2018) (10 - 15 minutes) 4. 'Sky Orchestra' (2022) (10 - 15 minutes)
45 - 70 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Walk through the exhibition with your class and allow students time to contemplate the exhibition independently (5 - 10 minutes) 2. 'Supermarket' (2021) (10 -15 minutes) 3. 'Golden Hour – Long Exposure series' (2018) (10 - 15 minutes) 4. 'In memory's eye, we travel' (2016) (10 - 15 minutes) 5. 'Sky Orchestra' (2022) (10 - 15 minutes)



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2. LEARNINGS AND THE VICTORIAN CURRICULUM

This guide is designed to navigate the artworks in 'The Memory Palace: Cyrus Tang'. It has direct connections to the Victorian Curriculum F-10: Levels 3 - 6

There are four components to this tour which involve:

- Visual Arts
- English (Speaking and Listening)
- Critical and Creative Thinking, and
- Intercultural Capability.

LEVELS 3 AND 4

victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/level3

victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/level4

Visual Arts

In Levels 3 and 4, students explore how and why artists, craftspeople and designers realise their ideas through different art forms. They enhance their perceptual skills by observing the world around them and expressing these observations through different practical applications of art making. Through observational, imaginative, and sensory investigations, students become more knowledgeable and discerning about their practices as a visual artist.

English (Speaking and Listening)

In Levels 3 and 4, students communicate with peers and teachers from other classes and schools in a range of face-to-face and online/virtual environments.

Critical and Creative Thinking

In Levels 3 and 4, the curriculum focuses on developing the knowledge, skills and understanding to improve and monitor thinking. Students learn and consider the advantages of different thinking techniques. Students learn there are different ways to respond to problems, visualise thinking and think more effectively.

Intercultural Capability

In Levels 3 and 4, the curriculum focuses on developing the knowledge, skills and understandings to enable students to learn about culture relevant to their social world of family, home, school, friends and neighbourhood. This includes cultural practices such as choice of food, clothing or housing, cultural celebrations and language.

The curriculum provides the opportunity for students to compare different cultures. They use their experiences of family, school, and wider community to reflect on cultural diversity within Australia.



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2. LEARNINGS AND THE VICTORIAN CURRICULUM (CONT)

LEVELS 5 AND 6

victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/level5

victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/level6

Visual Arts

In Levels 5 and 6, students explore how and why artists, craftspeople and designers realise their ideas through different visual forms, practices, and processes. They develop conceptual and expressive skills.

English

In Levels 5 and 6, students communicate with peers and teachers from other classes and schools, community members, and individuals and groups, in a range of face-to-face and online/virtual environments.

Students engage with a variety of texts for enjoyment. They listen to, read, view, interpret and evaluate spoken, written and multimodal texts in which the primary purpose is aesthetic, as well as texts designed to inform and persuade. These include various types of media texts including newspapers, film and digital texts, junior and early adolescent novels, poetry, non-fiction, and dramatic performances.

Critical and Creative Thinking

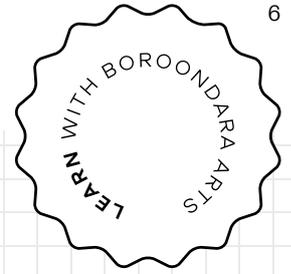
In Levels 5 and 6, the curriculum focuses on developing the knowledge, skills and understanding to test the strength of thinking. Students develop their capacity to deliberately manage their thinking. Students explore common errors that can occur in thinking.

Intercultural Capability

In Levels 5 and 6, the curriculum focuses on developing the knowledge, skills and understandings to enable students to learn about diverse cultural practices and beliefs and how they compare with their own. This includes religious beliefs, traditional celebrations, family relationships, gender roles, daily routines, leisure activities and language.

The curriculum provides the opportunity for students to explore aspects of their life that are culturally determined. Students further develop their awareness of cultural diversity and reflect on intercultural experiences and how this influences their own personal attitudes and beliefs.





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3. CURRICULUM LINKS: LEVELS 3-6 LEARNING AREAS AND CAPABILITIES

VISUAL ARTS

Levels 3 and 4

Identify and discuss how ideas are expressed in artworks from a range of places, times, and cultures, including artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (VCAVAR028).

Levels 5 and 6

Identify and describe how ideas are expressed in artworks by comparing artworks from different contemporary, historical and cultural contexts, including artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (VCAVAR032).

ENGLISH

Levels 3 and 4

- Learn extended and technical vocabulary and ways of expressing opinion including modal verbs and adverbs (VCELA273).
- Listen to and contribute to conversations and discussions to share information and ideas and negotiate in collaborative situations and use interaction skills, including active listening and clear, coherent communications (VCELY275).

Levels 5 and 6

- Describe what they have learnt about themselves and others from intercultural experiences including a critical perspective on and respect for their own and other's cultures (VCICCB006).
- Participate in and contribute to discussions, clarifying and interrogating ideas, developing, and supporting arguments, sharing and evaluating information, experiences and opinions, and use interaction skills, varying conventions of spoken interactions according to group size, formality of interaction and needs and expertise of the audience (VCELY366).

CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING

Levels 3 and 4

- Construct and use open and closed questions for different purposes (VCCCTQ010).
- Examine and use the structure of a basic argument, with an aim, reasons, and conclusion to present a point of view (VCCCTR013).





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3. CURRICULUM LINKS: LEVELS 3-6 LEARNING AREAS AND CAPABILITIES (CONT)

CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING

Levels 5 and 6

- Examine how different kinds of questions can be used to identify and clarify information, ideas and possibilities (VCCCTQ021).
- Investigate common reasoning errors including contradiction and inconsistency, and the influence of context (VCCCTR024).
- Examine the difference between valid and sound arguments and between inductive and deductive reasoning, and their degrees of certainty (VCCCTR027).

INTERCULTURAL CAPABILITY

Levels 3 and 4

- Compare their own and others cultural practices, showing how these may influence the ways people relate to each other (VCICCB005).
- Describe what they have learnt about themselves and others from intercultural experiences including a critical perspective on and respect for their own and other's cultures (VCICCB006).

- Explain the role of cultural traditions in the development of personal, group and national identities (VCICCD007).
- Identify how understandings between culturally diverse groups can be encouraged and achieved (VCICCD008).

Levels 5 and 6

- Analyse how aspects of their own and others lifestyle, behaviour, attitudes, and beliefs can be culturally influenced (VCICCB009).
- Explain how intercultural experiences can influence beliefs and behaviours, including developing a critical perspective on and respect for their own and other's cultures (VCICCB010).
- Identify barriers to and means of reaching understandings within and between culturally diverse groups (VCICCD011).
- Examine and discuss the variety of ways in which people understand and appreciate differing cultural values and perspectives, and the things which promote or inhibit effective engagement with diverse cultural groups (VCICCD012).





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4. DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE FEATURED ARTIST AND ARTWORKS

With your class, stand in front of 'Supermarket' (2021).



A series of photographs created during the 2020-21 COVID-19 lockdowns in Melbourne reflect the experience of everyday life during exceptional circumstances. Using abstraction to open up the viewers' imagination, these works feature layers of well-known, everyday imagery such as powerlines, tram tracks and supermarket aisles.

Tang always carries her camera on daily walks and she is obsessive about finding similar compositions in urban areas. The artist revisits the same spot every day, exploring the difference between looking at the surrounding scenery through your eyes, compared to how it is seen and captured through the lens of a camera. Over a period of time Tang builds up hundreds of images which she experiments with on a computer.

Tang looks for similarities and recurring motifs in each photo. She overlays the images upon one another, turning the source imagery into something else. This intensive analogue process results in surreal images that feel like a memory or an evasive thought, as the brain attempts to grasp the recognisable forms within the picture plane.



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ASK YOUR CLASS:

Look closely at this photograph. Where do you think this image was taken?

This photograph is of a supermarket aisle. When you look closely, you can see the shelves, ceiling vents, hanging signs, and someone walking in the distance. The more you look, the more you try to see what your brain knows is there somewhere, such as packaged food. Can you see what's on the shelves, or see any words appear? It feels nearly impossible to make anything out!

Try to remember the last time you went to a supermarket. What can you remember? Who were you with, and what did you buy?

Answers will vary. Because the trip was probably recent, students will likely remember things like what day it was, which shop they went to, who they were with, and many more details.

Now try to remember a supermarket trip from a year ago. What can you remember? Do you still remember who you were with, and what you bought? What about what was on special? Or what you were wearing? Do you remember who served you at the checkout?

Students will likely remember less. When you try to remember details from

a long time ago, the details become a bit fuzzy. You can feel your brain straining to recall all the little details that you can't quite grasp. Because trips to the shops are fairly ordinary, they probably can't remember anything that stands out from just one trip a long time ago.

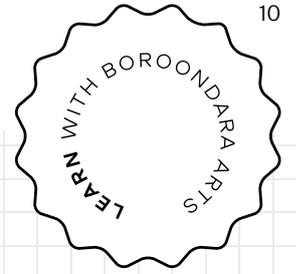
Let's come back to the artwork now. Why do you think the artist made the image blurry and discoloured?

The artist uses techniques in her photographs to capture the feeling of trying to hold onto details from the past. It takes a lot of time and effort to edit the photos this way, using many different photos of the same place overlapped. When we try hard to remember something from a long time ago, it feels straining to hang onto many of the details. After a while, our memories become blurrier, just like this photograph.

Do you think you'll pay more attention when you go to the shops next time?

Sometimes we get so used to ordinary things that we forget to really take in what's around us. Next time you're at the shops, or at the park or in the backyard, try to really pay attention to what's around you, you might notice something extraordinary!



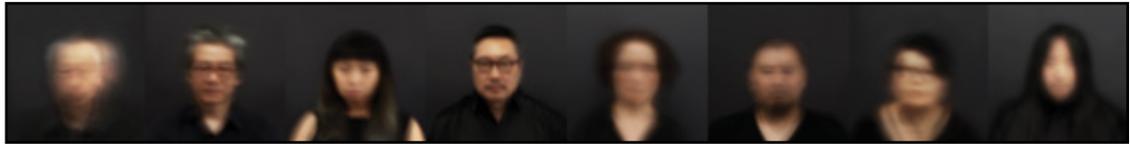


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4. DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE FEATURED ARTIST AND ARTWORKS

With your class, stand in front of 'Golden Hour - Long Exposure Series' (2018).



Tang was born in Hong Kong and much of her work is informed by Eastern and Western cultural influences and points of interest.

A series of long exposure portraits called 'Golden Hour - Long Exposure series', features immigrants from China and Hong Kong who all moved to Australia following significant points in history, including the 1960's Cultural Revolution, the 1967 Hong Kong riots, and the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and massacre. Each subject sat in front of the camera and watched a movie about various changes in Hong Kong and China. Tang aimed to capture an emotional shift, to examine the stereotype that deems people of Asian background to be less emotionally expressive than Westerners.



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ASK YOUR CLASS:

Why do you think these photographs are blurry?

Cyrus Tang created these photographs using a technique called 'long exposure'. This means that the photographer keeps the shutter of the camera open for an unusually long period of time. Instead of capturing an image in a split second, it captures one image over the course of a much longer time. In 'Golden Hour - Long Exposure series', the people were photographed with long exposure over the course of watching a video. The people in the portraits are all Chinese or Hong Kong immigrants, and the video they were watching documented all the big changes and events that have happened in China and Hong Kong over the last 50+ years. The more they moved while watching this video, the blurrier the image is.

Why do you think the artist captured these subjects face-on rather than including the video they're watching or their surroundings?

A picture or painting of just one person is called a portrait. Artists create portraits to really try and capture who a person

is and how they're feeling. Sometimes you can learn a lot about someone by being attentive and really looking, like if you were facing someone and having a meaningful conversation. Look closely at the subject's expressions and think about how they're feeling.

How would you feel if you left your home and moved to another country? Would you feel excited, scared, or overwhelmed to be in a new place? How do you think the people in the portraits feel?

Answers will vary, and some students may have experienced this. The video these subjects were watching shows major events in China and Hong Kong, such as the Cultural Revolution, Hong Kong riots, and the Tiananmen Square protests and massacre. These events affected many people. Not everyone who moved away necessarily wanted to leave their home, while for some it was an exciting opportunity. Everyone's experience is different, but it's also emotional to remember your home country and to see how much has changed over time, including the many lives that have been affected whether they stayed or immigrated.





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4. DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE FEATURED ARTIST AND ARTWORKS

With your class, stand in front of 'In memory's eye, we travel' (2016).



This video piece depicts a house coming apart and slowly melting, a commentary on catastrophic world events that took place in 2015 including the Syrian War and the Nepal earthquake. Both events devastated communities but featured in the news cycle only briefly. Using visual effects, the imagery of a house being destroyed depicts the displacement that many people went through and continue to experience, but the rest of the world has disconnected from.



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ASK YOUR CLASS:

What is happening to the house throughout the video?

The house is slowly coming apart, collapsing, and being consumed by black liquid. This is all created by visual effects and feels eerie or creepy to watch, especially because home is where people usually feel safest.

What do you think the artist is trying to say in this video?

This video is about refugees, meaning people who have had to move due to war or other necessary reasons. During war or natural disasters, people have needed to escape to be safe, but they have had to leave their homes when they didn't want to. Sadly, sometimes their homes are destroyed.

How would you feel if you had to leave home suddenly?

Answers will vary, but most students would feel sad or scared. It's important to try to feel and understand how someone else feels even if it makes you sad. This is called empathy or putting yourself in someone else's shoes.

Understanding other people's life experiences means we can support each other better. Many people from different countries come to Australia for different reasons to build a happy life for themselves and their families. We're very lucky to live in a country without war, and where lots of people from different countries and cultures can come together and learn from each other.





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4. DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE FEATURED ARTIST AND ARTWORKS

With your class, stand in front of 'Sky Orchestra' (2022).



In this work, Tang reflects on her childhood in the 1970s, and the prevalent desire for people of lower-class to climb socially by getting a good education and exposure to culture. In 'Sky Orchestra', the artist uses the piano - a symbol of status - to examine processes of cultural colonisation. Tang played a song on the piano based on a Chinese poem that is part of the high school curriculum in Hong Kong, a song that reminds her of her father. The piano was later moved to an open, rural field in Australia and symbolically burnt in protest of these cultural markers of success. The ashes of the piano are presented as musical notes within an installation in the gallery.



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ASK YOUR CLASS:

Can you play the piano? Do you have a piano at your house?

Not everyone has had piano lessons or has a piano at their house. For many people it is a status symbol to own and to play the piano because it can be expensive, and it takes many years to learn how to play the piano very well. For hundreds of years in Western countries, activities associated with Western classical culture like playing the piano and learning ballet have been a symbol of social status including wealth, education, and intelligence. For some immigrants, learning these skills has been a way to try to be accepted and to be socially identified by Western standards.

How do you think the artist feels about this expectation for immigrants to fit into Western social standards?

Cyrus Tang feels the idea that immigrants need to be 'Westernised' is unfair. It's important to celebrate and uplift different cultures rather than everyone being the same. In the video, she burns the piano in an open field as an act of protest. While this might seem like an extreme action, burning can be a symbol of changing something to make way for new growth, not just simply destroying something. Think of controlled bushfires that clear the land to protect it and help new trees and plant life to flourish.

The piano can be considered a symbol of wealth and social status in Western culture. How has the artist tried to give new meaning to the piano in her work?

Firstly, the song she plays on the piano is based on a Chinese poem that her father loved. This honours the culture she grew up in and her family by remembering her roots.

Secondly, the remnants of the burned piano have been transformed into the musical notes hanging in the installation. The artist has taken something that has symbols and meaning as one thing and has instead honoured her heritage and made it something that is completely new and her own, something beautiful.

Is there an activity you do that's part of your culture, or something that you just like to do? Maybe it's sport, language or musical lessons, or dancing?

There are so many different things we like to do in our free time! Encourage your students to share their favourite activity or teach something about it. Maybe some of these activities have similarities or can be combined to make something totally new and special.

